

JUSOOR

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PALESTINE & THE SACRED

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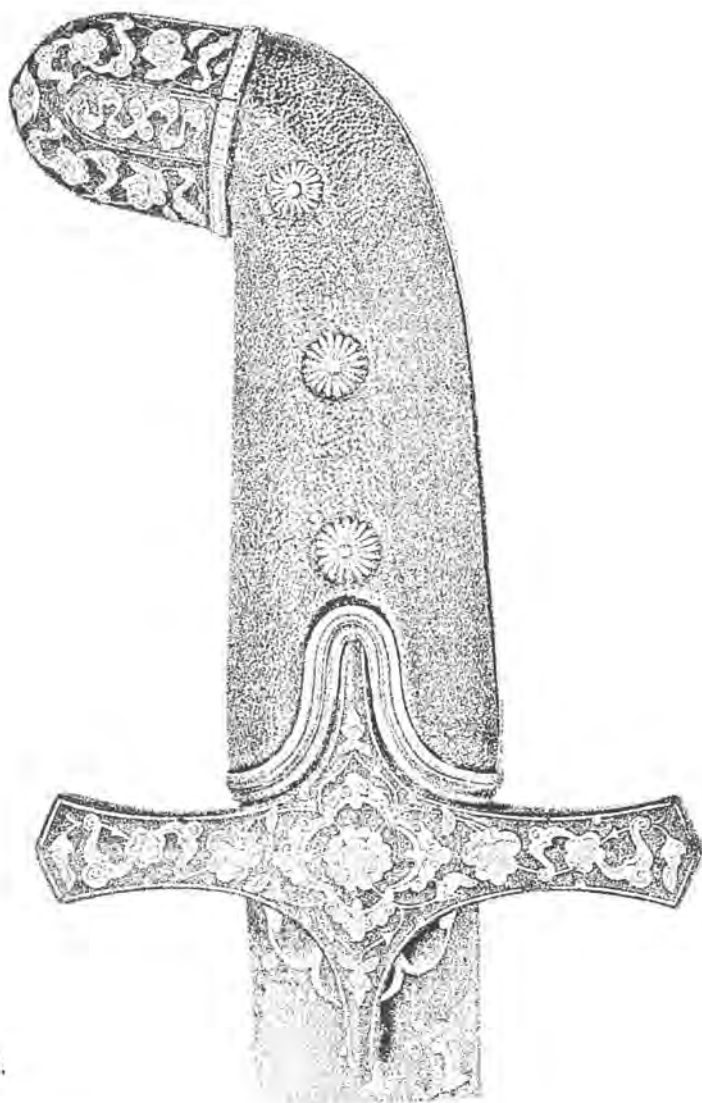
MUNIR AKASH

WINTER-SPRING 1994





"Cavaliere,"
bronze, 1951,
45 inches high
Weintraub Gallery,
New York



Detail of hilt.
Topkapı Sarayı,
İstanbul.

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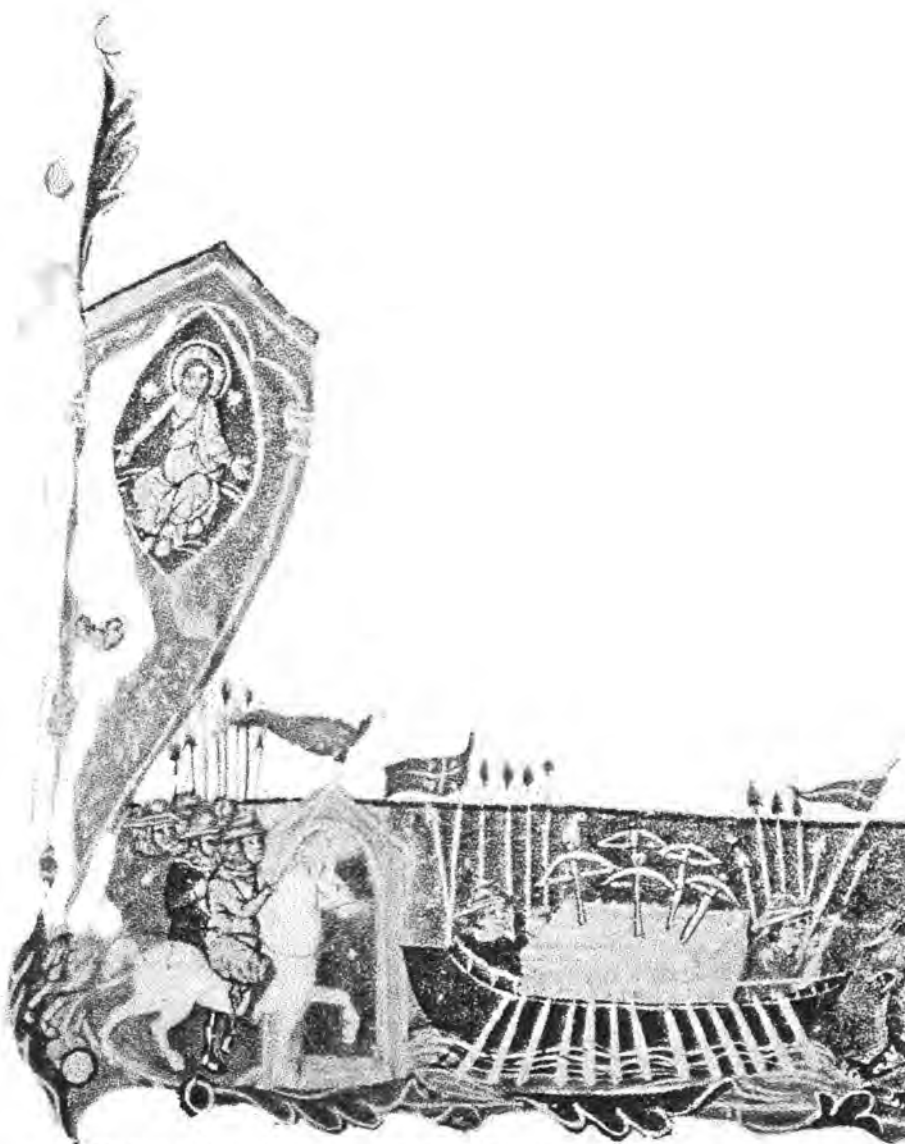
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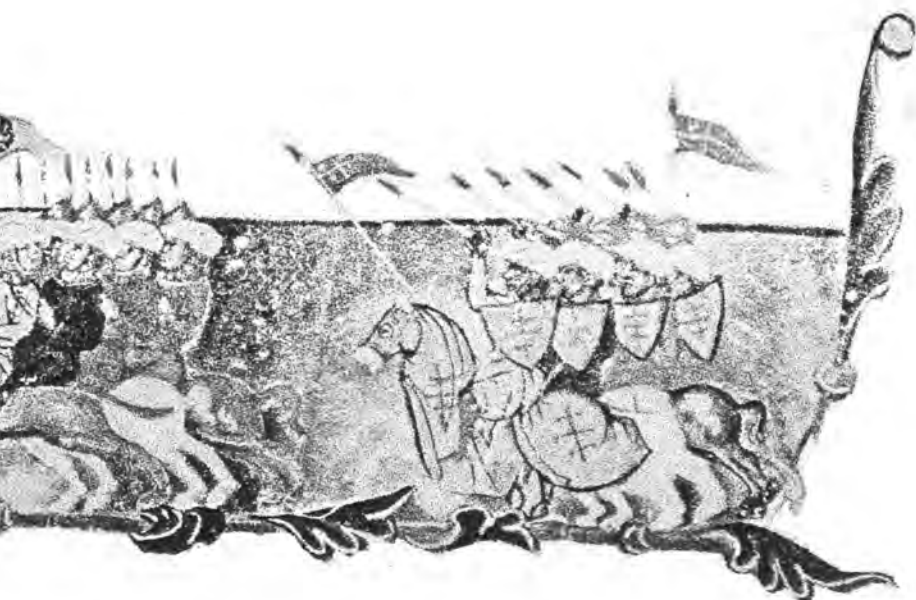
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Muslims and Crusaders in a galley loaded with crossbows: from
A Handbook for Crusaders by Marinus Sanutus, c. 1321

PALESTINE AND THE SACRED
LA PALESTINE ET LE SACRÉ

فلسطين والقدس



P
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S مزامير محمود درويش

Mahmud Darwish

Translated by Husain Haddawy

ONE

Whether I love you, or I love you not.

I go, leaving behind addresses liable
to be lost.

And I await those who return,
who come knowing my times of death.
I love you when I love you not.
The walls of Babylon are close
in the daylight, and your eyes
are big, and your face looms
large in the light.

It is as if you have not been born yet,
we have not separated, and you
have not felled me, as if above
the storm tops every speech is
beautiful, every reunion,
a farewell.



And there is nothing between us but
This encounter, nothing but this farewell.

Whether I love you, or I love you not.

My brow escapes me, and I feel
that you are nothing or everything,
and that you are subject to loss.

Whether I want you, or I want you not.

The murmur of the streams burns in
my blood, on the day I see you
and depart.



I tried to recover the friendship of
some vanished things, and
I succeeded.

I tried to boast of eyes which open
wide for every face, and I
succeeded.

I tried to paint a name for an olive
tree around a waist, and a star
propagated.

I want you when I say I want you not.

My face sank down; in a far off river
my body melted; and in the
market, like canned soup, they
sold my blood.

I want you when I say I want you.

O woman! I placed the Mediterranean
in your lap, Asia's orchards on
your shoulders, and all the chains
in your heart.

Whether I want you, or I want you not,

The murmur of the streams, the rustle
of the pines, the roar of the
seas, and the feathers of the nightingales
burn in my blood, on the day
I see you and depart.

Whether I sing of you, or I sing not.

I lapse into silence; I cry. There is no
date for the crying, no date for
the silence, and you are the sole
cry, and you are the sole silence.

My skin is enmeshed with my throat. Under
my window, wearing guards, cross
the wind and darkness unannounced.
When the soldiers shall descend from
my palms,

I shall write something.

When the soldiers shall descend from
my feet,

I shall walk a little.

When the soldiers shall vanish from
my sight,

I shall see you, see myself upright again.

Whether I sing of you, or I sing not,

You are the sole song; you sing of me,
if I lapse into silence, you
the sole silence.

TWO

Nowadays,
I find myself dried up,
Like the trees which grow in books,
While the wind is a passing issue.
Shall I fight or not?
This is not the question.
Suffice it that my throat is strong.
Shall I work or not?
This is not the question,
Suffice it that I rest eight days in the week,
According to Palestine time.
O homeland which recurs in songs and slaughters,
Show me the source of death.
Is it the dagger or the lie?

That I may my last roof remember,
I must sit in the open.
That I may not forget the pure air of my land,
I must consumption breathe.
That I may remember the gazelles which swim in
the whiteness,
I must be detained by my memories.
That I may not forget how high my mountains are,
I must release the tempest from my brow.

That I may keep possession of my distant sky,
I must possess nothing, even my skin.

O homeland which recurs in slaughters and in songs,
Why do I smuggle you from airport to airport,
Like the opium,
The white ink,
And the transmitter?



I wish to paint your likeness,
You, scattered between the files and the sudden acts.
I wish to paint your likeness,
You, flying with the splinters of bombs and
wings of sparrows.
I wish to paint your likeness,
But heaven grabs my hand.
I wish to paint your likeness,
You who are trapped between the wind and the dagger.
I wish to paint your likeness,
To find my own in you;
Therefore, I am accused of raiding and of forging
documents and pictures,
O you who are trapped between the dagger and the wind.

O homeland which recurs in songs and slaughters,
How do you change into a dream, stealing surprise,
To leave me but a stone?
Perhaps you are more beautiful than a dream,
Perhaps more beautiful.

There is no name left in Arab history
For me to borrow
And slip to your secret windows.
All the Code names are reserved
In the air conditioned recruitment offices.
Do you accept my name, My only alias,
Mahmud Darwish?
The police whips and the pines of Carmel
Have stripped from my flesh
My true name.

O homeland which recurs in slaughters and in songs,
Show me the source of death.
Is it the dagger,
or the lie?

THREE

When my words were
Earth,
I was a friend to the ears of corn.

When my words were
Rage,
I was a friend to the chains.

When my words were
Stone,
I was a friend to the streams.

When my words were
Rebellion,
I was a friend to the earthquakes.

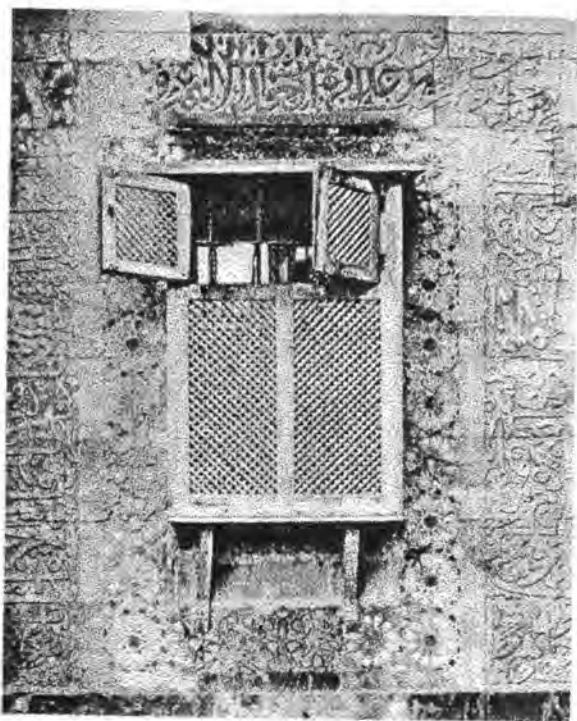
When my words were
Colocynth,
I was a friend to the optimist.

When my words became
Honey,
The flies covered
My lips.



FOUR

I left my face on my mother's
napkin,
Carried the mountains in my memory,
and left.
The city broke open its gates,
Growing on the ship decks,
As the green grows in the
receding gardens.
I lean on the wind.
O body that breaks not,
Why do I sway,
Since you have been my wall?



And I am smoothed by the distance,
As lovers' faces are smoothed by
recent death.

The closer I come to the flutes,
The more I waste.
O passages replete with emptiness,
When shall I arrive?

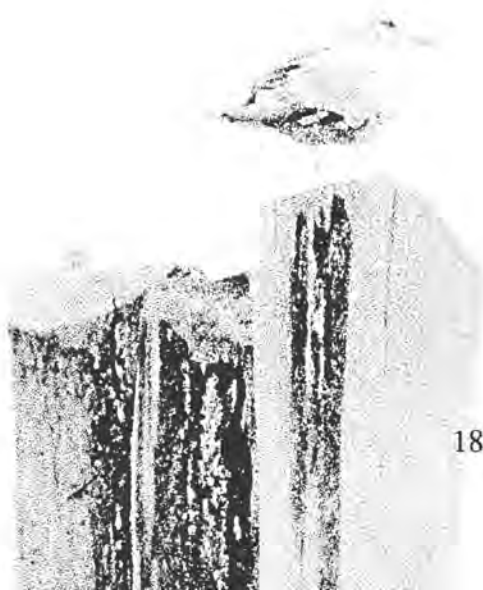
Blessed be he who wraps himself in
his own skin.
Blessed be he who remembers without
errors his true name.

Blessed be he who eats an apple
and does not turn into a tree.
Blessed be he who drinks the
waters of the distant rivers,
And does not turn into a cloud.
Blessed be the rock that loves
its bondage,
And does not choose the freedom of
the wind.

FIVE

Is it that every time a cloud pauses
above a wall,
My brow hastens to it, like a broken
window,
Forgetting that I am doomed to forget,
Without identity?

I can explode,
Like virginity.
O how my eyes the wider open for more
prophetic faces!
O seas which are weary of your color,
Follow me, and I shall show you another rod.
I am capable of a miracle,
Like the East.



I am a condition which loses itself,
When it ceases to cry.
Do you call the thunder thunder,
the lightning lightning,
If the voice stops, and the color goes away?

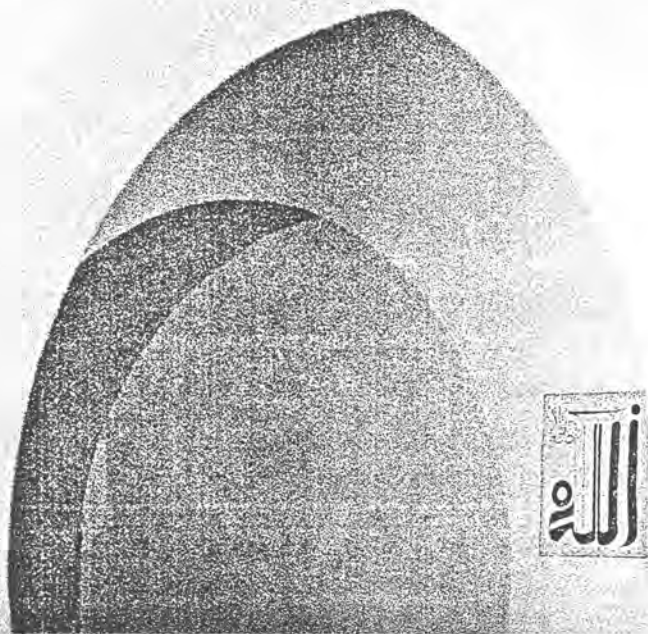
Is it that every time I leave my skin
And the senility of the place,
The shade propagates and covers me?
Is it that every time I blow the
winds in the sand,

To look for a forgotten ember,
I find nothing but the face I left
On my mother's napkin?
I am capable of dying
like a thunderbolt.

SIX

The trees of my homeland practice greenness,
And I practice memory,
And the voice lost in the wilderness
Turns to the sky and kneels:
"O clouds will you return?"
I am not so sad,
But he does not love the sparrows
Who does not know the trees.
And he does not know surprise
Who is used to the lie.
I am not so sad,
But he does not know lying
Who does not know fear.

I am not so limited,
But it is the trees which are very high.
Ladies and gentlemen
I love the sparrows,
I know the trees,
I know surprise,
Because I know no lie.
I shine like the truth and the dagger,
Therefore, I tell you:
"Shoot the sparrows,
That I may describe the trees.
Stop the Nile,
That I may describe Cairo.
Stop the Tigris or the Euphrates or both,
That I may describe Baghdad.
Stop Barada,
That I may describe Damascus.
Stop me from speaking,
That I may describe myself."



SEVEN

There were the shadow of the palms, the
last martyr, and the radio daily
broadcasting sound pictures of the
ones we love. I love you in
autumn and winter.

-- Haifa cried not, but you did cry. We
have not forgotten the details of the
town, be it prophets or a woman.

Was it the sea? No. The sea did not
enter our homes this way. Five
windows were submerged, but
the roofs remained teeming
with straw and sky.

-- I bid my jailer farewell. He was happy
with the cheap war. O homeland
of carnation and the gun, my
mother was not with me, and
I went looking for you behind
time and the radio. Your
aspect tore me down and left
me dust.

Speech was a sin, silence, exile, the
Fedayeen, prisoners longing
for death in your valley. Death
was their ticket of admission to
you, you who disdained the
tears.

Memories are sometimes the strangers'
identity, but time sleeps with
memory, begetting refugees, left
by the past without remembrance.
Do you remember us? What if you say
"Aye"? Do we remember everything
about you? What if we say, "Aye"?
And we know that the world
has judges who worship the
strong.



I tossed my memories from every
window, like a melon rind, and
I lay in the evening glow, adjacent
to the pines [The rains glisten
in a distant country, and the girls
pluck a mysterious fear]. The
memories flashed like a lightning
through my flesh, returning me to

You... to you. Memories and death
alike, both lead to you... to you,
O homeland swaying between
the daggers of the world and
heaven's waist.

There were the shadow of the palms,
the last martyr, and the radio
daily broadcasting sound
pictures of the ones we love.
I love you in autumn
and winter.



EIGHT

O country, whose many names the
humors know,
The whips of history do know you,
And the jails of history,
And the exiles of history.
O you who were captive in every age,
Why define yourself with such adventure,
And why declare yourself
The fetus of the world?
And why are you beautiful to the point
of self-destruction?
Moreover,
Why not disown me,
That I may cease from death?

O country which is as cruel as sleepiness,
Declare once and for all:
"Our love has ended,"
That I may be able to die and depart.

I do envy the winds which suddenly veer away
From my forefathers' ashes.
I do envy the thoughts hidden in the
martyrs' memory.

I do envy your names hidden in
 children's eyes,
But I do not envy myself.
You spread over my body like sweat,
You spread in my body like lust,
You occupy my memory like an invader,
You occupy my brain like light.
Die, that I may mourn you.
Or be my wife, that I may know unfaithfulness,
Only once.



NINE

O rose standing outside of time and
the senses.

O kiss in the kerchiefs of the winds,
Surprise me with one dream,
So that my madness may leave you
alone.

I distanced myself from you,
In order to approach you,
And found time.

I came near you,
To be away from you,
And found the senses.

Between the approach and the distance,
There is a stone as big as the dream
Which moves neither farther
Nor nearer.

You are my country,
And I am not a stone;
Therefore, I neither border the sky,
Nor parallel the earth,
But remain a stranger.

TEN

The state of drawn -out death
Took me back to a street in childhood's
 suburbs,
Took me into homes,
Hearts,
Ears of corn,
And gave me an identity,
And made me a cause,
The state of drawn -out death.

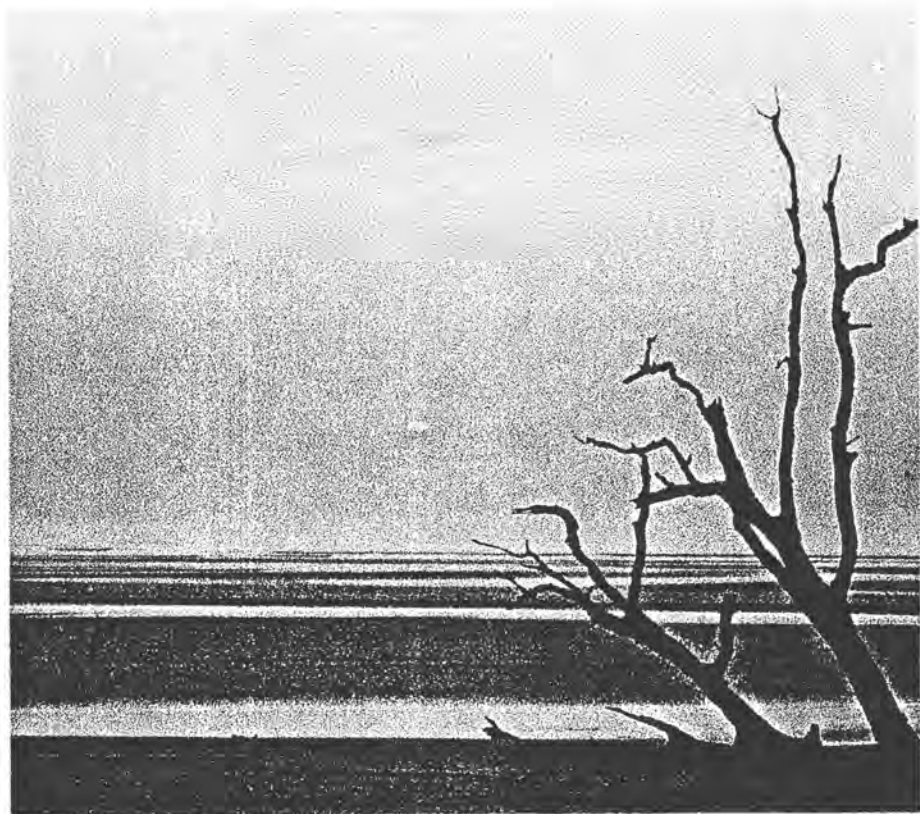
They thought that I was dead,
The crime mortgaged with songs.
They went by and did not pronounce my name.
They buried my body in files and *coup*
 d'etats, and left.
[And the country of which I used to dream
 will remain the country of which
 I used to dream.]

It was a short life
And a drawn -out death.
I awoke a while,
And wrote the name of my country on
 my body
And my gun,
And said, "This is my way;
This is my guide
To the coastal towns,
And I began to move,
But they slew me.

They buried my body in the files and
 coup d'etats, and left.
And the country of which I used to
 dream will remain the country
 of which I used to dream.
In the state of drawn -out death,
I am the master of sorrow.
Every Arab woman in love is shedding
 tears.
The singers and the orators gather
 around me,
And on my body sprout poetry and
 the leaders

And all the brokers of the national tongue.
Applaud,
Applaud,
Applaud,
And long live
The state of drawn -out death.

The state of drawn-out death
Took me back to a street in
 childhood's suburbs,
Took me into homes, hearts, and ears
 of corn,
Made me a cause,
And gave me an identity,
And the heritage of chains.



ELEVEN

Nothing remains
But to seek refuge in your shadow,
 which is my own.
Nothing remains
But to dwell in your voice, which
 is my voice.

I rolled away from the cross which
 stretched like a bright day
On a wide horizon.
I rolled to the lowest hill to be seen,
But found neither my freedom nor
 my wound,
Because I did not know your place.
I found not my step,

Because my back was not fastened
to you with nails.

I am bent

Like your sky which keeps up with
the windows of the plane.

Give back to me the syllables of my name,
That I may seek firmness in the fibers
of the trees.

Give back to me the letters of my face,
That I may to the coming storms
appeal.

Bring back to me the causes of
my joy.

That I may to the senseless street
appeal.

Because my voice is as dry as a
flagmast,

My hand as empty as a national anthem,

My shadow as wide as a festival,

And my features joy ride in an
ambulance,

Because I am this way,

I am a citizen of an unbom country.



TWELVE

I arrested my self within my self,
Because my self is not a spy on my self,
While the rain fell outside,
Without reason.

Blessed be he who knows the limits of
my happiness,
Blessed be the god who declaims my
freedom,
Blessed be the guard who keeps my peace
in his watchful eyes.

Blessed be he who understands the
meaning of my being prisoner and
guard at once.

O windows, as distant as the first love,
I do not dwell in Babylon;
It is Babylon that dwells in my features,
Wherever I go.

O windows, as distant as the first love,
I am not exiled;
Far from my heart I exiled exile and went away.

The rain falls outside
Without reason.
The drought spreads inside
For many reasons.

Who then will reorder the seasons,
Who will change the calendar,
Who will teach me Damascus dirges
In Jerusalem's streets, cursed by the Lord.
But for the first time I do announce
My date of birth
Which is . . .

THIRTEEN

I ready myself for eruption
At the edge of dream,
As the dry wells ready themselves
For the flood.

I ready myself for birth
At the edge of dream,
As the stone readies itself
In the depths of dead mines.
I am eager for death
At the edge of dream,
As the martyr is eager to die
Another time.

I ready myself to shout
At the edge of truth,
As the volcano readies itself
For eruption.



FOURTEEN

The journey has ended.
Who will cover my beloved?
How did the sudden evening pass,
How did it hide
In the eyes of my beloved?
The journey has ended.

My friends pass me by,
My friends suddenly die.
The journey has ended
At the wing of the swallow.
The journey did begin
When the prisoner escaped.



I did not taste ruin
In the chatter of the chains.
My flesh was exposed.
To my enemy,
Like the houses' roofs,
But I did not taste ruin
In the chatter of the chains.

My friends pass me by,
My friends suddenly die.

FIFTEEN

I am running away from the borders
 which have devoured my friends,
The borders which are running after me,
Closing in,
Touching my mouth.

It is difficult for you to know
Where-the myth ends,
And where my face begins,
Because the borders are near.
These trenches which are dug into my brow
Are not the marks of years.
And these blue lines under my eyes
Are not a proof of nights with women.
They are borders branching out in my body.

I am doomed to defeat,
My enemy destined to triumph.
I am steadfast in defeat,
My enemy steadfast in triumph.

O darkness approaching the town,
Pour down. Pour down,
Because I intend to-night to leave
 my face which teems with borders
Towards my heart,
The only town not captured yet.

SIXTEEN

I play with time,
As a prince plays with a horse.
And I play with the days,
As children play with colored beads.

Today I celebrate
The passing of one day after another.
Tomorrow I shall celebrate
The passing of two days past yesterday,
Drinking the toast of yesterday
To commemorate the morrow.
Thus I live on.

When I fell off my bolting horse
And broke my arm,
I felt the hurt in the finger that
 had been wounded
A thousand years ago.

And when I commemorated the fortieth
 day of Acre,
I broke into tears for Granada.

And when they tied the noose
 around my neck,
I loathed my enemies,
Because they stole the bandage from
 my neck.



SEVENTEEN

Let us paint Jerusalem:

A god disrobing above a dark green
line; phantoms of departing
sparrows;

A cross standing in the back street;
something resembling plums and
surprise behind the arches;

A wide space stretching from the genitals
of a soldier to the history of a poet.

Writes Jerusalem:

The capital of false hope, the runaway
rebel, the absent star, in
whose alleys strange words mixed,
and the former kisses detached themselves
from the lips of the singers and
the peddlers.

A new wall rose to meet a new desire.

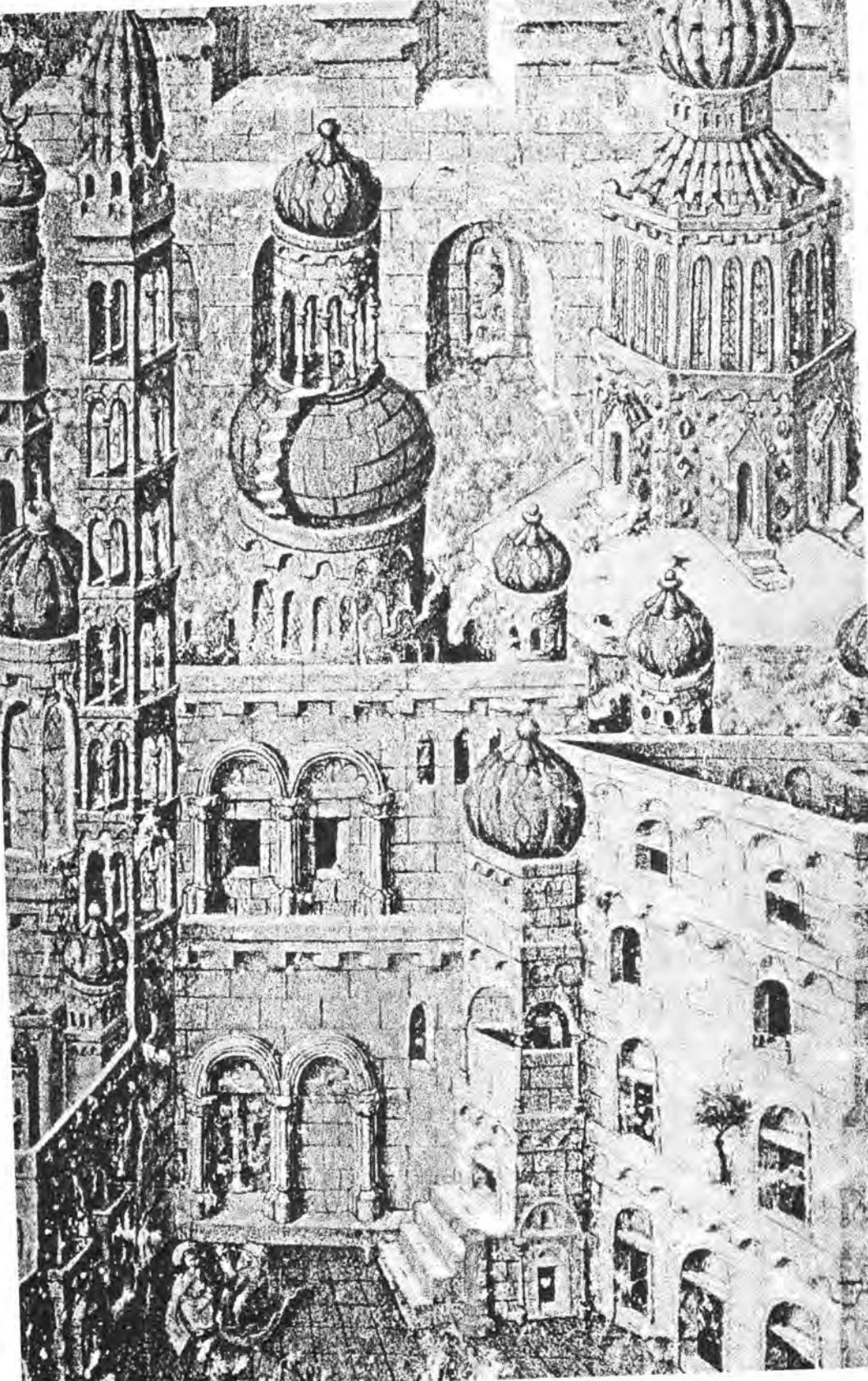
Troy joined the captives,
and the talking rock

Uttered nothing to prove the
contrary. Blessed be he who
aborts the fire in the thunderbolt.

Let us sing of Jerusalem:
O children of Babylon,
Born of the chains,
You shall soon return to Jerusalem,
Soon become men,
Soon reap the grain from the memory
of the past,
Soon shall the tears turn into
ears of corn.

Ah! Children of Babylon,
You shall soon return to Jerusalem,
Soon become men,
Soon...
Soon...
Soon...
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah

- * **Mahmoud Darwish**, a leading Arab poet from the village of al-Barweh in Galilee- Palestine. His symbolist poetry, which is of great subtlety and at times unique purity, expresses at once his political and social as well as his existential concerns. The recipient of many world literary awards, his poetry has been translated in over twelve languages.
- * **Husain Haddawy** was born and raised in Baghdad. Educated in the United States, he taught at the University of Wisconsin, Wesleyan University and the University of Rochester, and he is currently professor of English at the University of Nevada, at Reno. He has written on English literature, Arabic philosophy, and Islamic art and has translated extensively from modern Arabic poetry. His most recent work is a translation of *The Arabian Nights*, with a second column scheduled for publication this year.
- * **Picture Credits:** Max van Berchem 16, 17; Richard W. Brown 13; Joss Dray 40; Jane English 7, 12, 14, 15, 18, 26, 27, 36, 38, 39; Walter H. Hadge 6; Sven-Olaf Lindblad 9, 32; Atsuko Otsuka 37 (from *Faithful Witnesses* by Kamal Boullata); James P. Valentine 29; John de Visser 20; Steven C. Wilson 8,10; Alfred Yacoubzadeh 34 (from *Faithful Witnesses* by Kamal Boullata).





THE STRANGER

Translated by Noel Abdulahad

O Jesus Christ
When you roam
In the streets of Hebron
Or Bethlehem lanes;
In the coldness of this night
And wander from Beit Ania
 and Bair Zait
Envelop yourself
with your woolen cloak
For the the night is snowing
And the Wind is Screaming

Let not the sight of the corpses,
 of slaughtered children
Here and there,
Frighten you

Let not set up barricades
Or ruins of collapsed houses
In the dreary dull chill of this night
Stir your surprise

Be not shocked

Of the turning up
Of a nocturnal phantom
Pointing its gun
And ordering you: "Hands up"

Let not blemished faces
And hateful places
Horrify you
For Rachel is busying herself
In seducing a soldier
And Ruth is mocking her
For her failure to victimise Him

Wrap up yourself with your woolen Mantle
Envelope your weary face with sadness
And fold up your thoughts with cheerlessness

Kneel and pray
For all who are present here
Do not suffer only from loneliness
But their faces
Are also wreathed
In deserts' estrangement

The addresses were changed
The language too
And All things turned upside down

-2-

Martha and Mary were displaced
Trampling aimlessly in the prairies
Lazarus suffocating anew
The breath of a spiteful death
And alas.. the detested Time
Is tinting all alone, "This Age"
With time's bête noire.



IN PRISON AND ON PRISON

The leading Egyptian poet Muhammad Afifi Matar was a prisoner of conscience for seventy days in the spring of 1991, because of his objections to the Gulf War.¹ His imprisonment marked institutional efforts to silence a poetic rebel who constantly resisted all types of conformity, co-optation and cliquishness. His strangely intimate poetry defies academic classifications and is often dubbed by critics as ambiguous. Matar's so-called "obscurity," however, is more indicative of scholars' failure to cope with his unconventional poetic strategies and imagery than it is an apt description of his emotionally and intellectually charged language.

Born in a village in the Delta in 1935 of peasant stock, Matar kept the *fellah* intact and alive in his personal identity. Despite all the honors and prizes he has accumulated,² he remains today a proud peasant tilling the land in his beloved village, Ramlat al-Anjab. His intellectual quest led him to specialize in philosophy and delve into Pre-Socratic thought, medieval mysticism and post-Hegelian philosophy. But the speculative inclination in him was always combined with a certain admiration for the experiential in rural life. His hero has been the folk poet who responds to his audience and animates his people's intimate longings and cravings.

His latest volume of poetry will be published under the

title of "The Celebrations of the Savage Mummy."³ Matar dedicates the collection to his young daughter Rahma who was startled by the police "abduction" of her father from home while the family was peacefully sleeping in the early hours of March 2, 1991. She was equally puzzled by his disturbing absence for over two months and later -- on his return -- intrigued by the marks (of torture) on his face. She asked questions continuously -- questions that only children can articulate in repressive periods of history. The grown-ups often learn to curtail their curiosity and conscience. The entire collection is a response to Rahma's apprehensive inquisitiveness, and by extension to all those who have kept the child-like wonder in their heart and continue to interrogate the injustice of the world around them.

The collection presents the experience of prison in two distinct forms: once in the form of a series of poems describing the harrowing event in all its physical and psychic brutality, from the moment of the police "dawn visit" to the long days of detention and dehumanization. Secondly, the experience is narrated in a prosaic report that presents the poet's account and testimony of what happened in graphic detail.⁴ The lyrical persona in the poems corresponds to the activist witness in the report.⁵ These two modes of depicting an identical experience allow the critics to understand the imaginative mechanisms which transform a lived experience into a poetic text. The collection also provides for exploring the psychic reservoir of resistance latent in the depth of the oppressed and how it is mobilized to articulate cultural opposition and to confront the overwhelming power of incarcerating institutions.

In the three poems chosen for translation here, the poet presents himself in "This Night Begins." He offers a sketch of fellow prisoners in "The Five Brothers" and finally he presents in "Blood Dripping Faces" historical figures who have been imprisoned, persecuted or martyred.

The first poem, "This Night Begins," was written on March 27, 1991, while Matar was in Torah jail. It depicts the

poet's feelings when he was blindfolded and beaten. The imagery of light and darkness, of dawn and night, in the poem stems from his "nocturnal" experience. The poem ends on the possibility of a "dream" in this horrific "night", inspired by the *Roc* (the fabulous bird in Sindbad's Voyage).

The second poem, "The Five Brothers," was written on April 13, 1991, in the same jail. It presents five prisoners held in Torah jail who were kin brothers from Beni Suef, a town south of Cairo. The poem depicts their family waiting for their return: their mother restless and grieving, their father reflecting and agonizing, and their dog dreaming and fantasizing. This is a modest fisherman's family and the imprisoned brothers, reciting the Koran in their cell, wonder affectionately about the needs of their old parents. The last *tableau* in the poem presents the dog bringing back the bloodied vest of a victim. The finale is equivocal because the reader is unable to figure out whether it is the vest of one of the brothers or some other victim. However, whether the victim is one of the five brothers or someone else hardly matters in the logic of the poem since it is essentially a lament for the victimized and not for a specific victim, a plea for a humanitarian cause rather than a partisan one.

The third poem, "Blood Dripping Faces," was written in Lazoughly Arresting Compound, Torah Jail, Ramlat al-Anjab, and Benghazi in Libya, where the poet went for a conference following his release. The span of writing the poem is dated by the poet as March 12 to August 7, 1991. The poem describes the state of mind and soul of the poet when he was chained and tortured in the Arresting Compound. The poem opens by posing agonizing questions, and moves along to transform the despair into a poetic main through the recall of past luminaries who were persecuted and whom the poet admires. These Masters -- often referred to in the poem as Shaykhs -- are either named or evoked. They are, in the order of their appearance in the poem: the Prophet Muhammad; his grandson Al-Husayn; Socrates; Averroes, the Andalusian philosopher and jurist; Ibn Khaldun,

the historian and jurist; and Al-Niffari, the Iraqi mystic.

The opening of the poem bemoans the state of a world torn by strife and dominated by pandering news media, in which the poet's voice is silenced, and can at best flash like momentary lightning in the gloom. This is followed by the extraction of a confession from the poet prisoner in which he ironically disavows kings and masters of the world and the intervention of foreign armies (in reference to the Gulf War). The poet recognizes his banishment from these plagued cities with their false values and conjures up the masters of his thought as he sees his blood dripping. Thus he recalls the wounded Muhammed who was gently attended and soothed by Addas, a Christian from Ninevah in Mesopotamia. Then the poem mentions the Prophet's grandson, Al-Husayn, who was martyred in Kerbala in Iraq, alluding to his severed head which is said, in popular legends, to have flown to Egypt, declaring in its flight the Islamic creed, known as *al-shahada*: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is His prophet." The poem then moves to the Greek martyr, Socrates, "Shaykh of midwives," a son of a midwife, who compared his profession, philosophy, to that of a mental midwife. Socrates, the philosopher, died for his convictions by drinking hemlock. The list of the poet's *maîtres de pensée* is interpolated with the poet's wrenching sensations in his fetters, thus unifying his pains with those of Socrates and the other martyrs.

The fourth Master invoked is Averroes (Ibn Rushd) whose dead body is said to have been put in a saddle bag carried by a packhorse. To balance it, his prolific output of books was carried on the other side. Cordova mourned him, and a measure of consolation for this loss was the great mystic of Islam, Ibn Arabi, known to his followers as "the greatest master" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*). In his pantheistic doctrine of "Unity of Being," Ibn Arabi joined together opposites which explains the oxymorons used in the poem for his description. This is followed by a reference to Ibn Khaldun, a philosopher of history and a precursor of the modern discipline of sociology,

who wrote the principles of his new science in an extensive prologue to his universal history entitled *Al-Muqaddimah* (The Introduction).

The persona of the poet reflects, at this point, and wonders whether the bloodshed will go on forever. An affirmative response is provided by Al-Niffari, a sufi who was born in Iraq and died in Egypt; living the life of a wandering dervish, and like Socrates never committed his teaching to writing, leaving the task of transcription and compilation to disciples. An excerpt from the poetry of Al-Niffari is inserted in the poem which underscores Niffari's response to the poet's interrogation. In the finale, the poet urges himself to set the salutary faces, conjured up during the poet's passion, into verse composed within the confines of his chains.

The poem, thus, chronicles both an experience -- that of prison, torture, pain, and rejection of an unjust World Order -- as well as traces the inner trajectory of a poet attempting to accomplish a poetic endeavor. It is a poem that depicts the experience of prison and the experience of poetic composition. It is simultaneously a testimonial poem and *ars poetica* of a "tune wrought by its own blood."

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- 1) See the statement made by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights on April 3, 1991 (available in Arabic, English, and French), and the statement made by PEN American Center dated April 9, 1991, protesting Matar's detention.
- 2) Matar has been on the editorial board and editorial advisor for a number of journals: *Sanabil*, *Al-Aqlam*, *Mawaqif*, *Jusoor*, *Al-Adab*, and the General Egyptian Book Organization. He has received several literary awards including the State Literary Prize of Egypt for 1989, the Taha Husain Award (Minya University) for 1989, the Poetry International (Rotterdam) award for 1991, and the Cavafy Poetry Prize for 1992.
- 3) Matar has written a dozen collections of poetry as well as critical and cultural books and articles. He has been translated into English, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Chinese. The French Arabist Jacques Berque and the Irish Poet Desmond O'Grady among others have translated his poems.
- 4) See the English translation of Matar's testimony in *Pen International* XLII;1 (1992); 89-91.
- 5) See Ferial J. Ghazoul "The prison poem from rhetorics to testimony" (in Arabic) *Fusul* XI;3 (fall 1992); 337-352.

محمد عفيفي مطر
**THE CELEBRATIONS
OF THE SAVAGE MUMMY**
Translated by Ferial Ghazoul



Henry Fusli, *The Body of Buonconte da Montefeltre being Carried off by the Devil*,
pen and wash, British Museum, London

Muhammad Afifi Matar
إحتفاليات المومياء المتوحشة

THIS NIGHT BEGINS

An eternity of darkness or a night gathering
The blackness of kohl and tar from calamities' dust of Time?
Your eyes under a tied headband, its knot sinking
Into your skull, and you battered
--O last of the captives and no redeemer
Your country stormed, its wind and sand led into captivity--
And this night begins..

هَذَا اللَّيْلُ يَبْدَأُ
دَهْرٌ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ أَمْ هِيَ لَيْلَةٌ جَمَعَتْ سَوَادَ
الْكحلِ وَالْقَطْرَانِ مِنْ رَهَجِ الْفَوَاجِعِ فِي الدَّهْوَرِ!
عَيْنَاكَ تَحْتَ عَصَابَةٍ عَقَدْتُ وَسَاخَتْ فِي
عِظَامِ الرَّأْسِ عَقْدُهَا، وَأَنْتَ مُجَنْدَلُ
- يَا آخَرَ الْأَسْرَى.. وَلَسْتَ بِمُفْتَدَى.. فَبِلَادُكَ
انْعَصَفَتْ وَسِيقَ هَوَاؤُهَا وَتُرَابُهَا سَبِيًّا-
وَهَذَا اللَّيْلُ يَبْدَأُ

Beneath your eyelids the country lumped:
two balls of pussy salt
The night begins..
The sun, splinters of lightning, descends on your eyes
From His sublime realm. You scream
You won't be rescued until your face foully decays
Then you know this night begins..
In its minutes you count only rescue calls for lost dawn
The wind raising their resonance to Allah's tears in the horizons
This night begins..
Set a death for your dream and create a dream for your death
O patient body
Didn't you say: "Fear is your worst fear"?
Unveil the post of terror
Sift your ashes, manifest yourself
Choose from the horizons created by the daring Roc.



This image of Death's triumph was painted in the fifteenth century,
from: Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

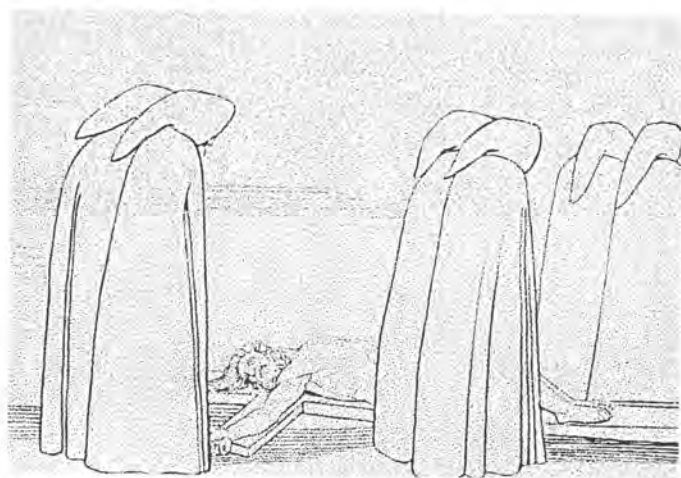
تَحْتَ جَفْنَيْكَ الْبِلَادُ تَكُومَتُ كَرَّتَيْنِ مِنْ مِلْحِ الصَّدِيدِ
الليل يبدأ
والشموسُ شظيَّةُ البرقِ الذي يهوي إلى عَيْنِكَ مِنْ
ملكوته العالي، فتصرخ،
لا تغاثُ بغيرِ أنْ ينحلَّ وجهك جيفةً تعلو
روائحها فتعرف أن هذا الليل يبدأ،
لستُ تُحصي مِنْ دَقَائِقِهِ سِوَى عَشْرِ اسْتِغَاثَاتٍ لِفَجْرِ
ضائعٍ تعلو بهنَّ الرُّوحُ جُلُجْلَةً لدمعِ الله في الآفاق..
هذا الليل يبدأ
فابتدىء موتاً لحلمك وابتدعُ حلماً لموتك
أيها الجسدُ الصَّبُورُ
«الخوفُ أقسى ما تخافُ».. ألم تقل؟!
فابدأ مقامَ الكشفِ للرَّهْبِوتِ
وانحلَّ مِنْ رَمَادِكَ، وانكشفْ عَنْكَ،
اصطفِ الآفاقَ مِمَّا يُبدعُ الرِّيحُ الجسورُ

١٩٩١/٣/٢٧، معتقل طرة

THE FIVE BROTHERS

Northerly blows the breeze before sunset
The plains are expanses of a pastoral fan
Beneath the dykes of Beni Suef, a stepping Nile lingers
The sun melting in it, languidly yellow
And in the carded clouds, smoldering
 embers of sunset's prayer call
Family table in the corner,
Soaked dates in moistened jugs,
Restlessly the woman looks at the entrances,
Neither her moves are relaxed by ablutions
Nor the spread-out fishing nets foretell their footsteps
On the doorstep their dog's head rested, its nostrils flared
Perhaps the scent of the muddy step
Will emit its desires
The old man lay on a carpet woven from mended sails
Combing his flowing beard with his palms
He gathered the powder in his snuffbox,
Inspected the horizon...

They are five... for whom the breast legacy split,
The moan of the bereaved mother roared,
And the dazed tears wailed !



John Flaxman, *Caiaphas and the Hypocrites*, illustration to Dante.

الإخوة الخمسة

تهبُّ شماليَّةً من أصيل الصِّبَا،
والسَّهوبُ امتدادٌ لمروحة العُشبِ،
تُبْطِئُ تحتَ جُسُورِ «بني سُوفٍ» خطوةً نبيلٍ،
تَذُوبُ به الشَّمْسُ في صُفْرَةٍ حائلةٍ
وغيمٌ نديفٌ تشبُّ به جمرةٌ من أذان الغروبِ،
وفي الركن طليَّةُ العائلةِ
عليها نقيعٌ من التَّمَرِ تندى أباريقه،
وهي لانبئةٌ تتلفتُ حولَ المداخلِ،
لا خطوها يرتخي بالوُضوءِ
ولا شبكُ الصَّيْدِ فوقَ مناشره مُنبئٌ بالخطي،

بالوصيد ارتخى رأسُ كلبهمو واشرابتُ معاطسُهُ
علَّ رائحةُ الخطوةِ المرحلةِ
تفوح اشتهاؤها،

افترش الشَّيْخُ سجادةً من نسيجِ القلوعِ المرتقِ،
وامتشطَ اللحيَّةُ المُرسلةِ
بكفيه ، للمم ذرو السَّعوطِ بعليته،
استعرض الأفق..

هم خمسة.. فلائيهمو انشقَّ إرثُ الرِّضاعةِ
واصطرختُ شهقةً ثاكلةً
وولولتُ الدمعةُ الذاهلة!

They are five
Standing in praying row in the prison cell
Their faces: purity of milk and vigor of blood
The youngest said, "Your old ones are awaiting the prayer call
His powder in the snuffbox, insufficient for his vigil"
The letters of the Verses bathed in tears
The crescent variegated by the passing cloud
The tear-bathed chanting, youngsters' cooing,
Rain-clouds tenderly condensed in Revelation
Night following in the track of night

Their dog at the doorstep flared its nostrils
Tempted by visions: game beasts flash,
Swifts are free in the expansive desert,
A gust of wind embraces distances,
Yelps in the depth of sky
And the vast world snorting the howling echoes
At dawn, it drops its catch at the doorstep
Growls of seized anger.
Amidst the vest's ornaments:
Glowing remains of blood and the convulsive scream.



Eugène Delacroix, study for *Liberty Leading the People*,
Musée du Louvre.

وهم خمسة ..

وقفوا في اصطفاق الصلاة بزنزانة السّجن:
أوجههم من نقاء الحليب وعاقية الدم،
أصغرهم قال: شيخاكمو في انتظار الأذان،
السعوطُ بعلبته ليس يكفيه سهرته،
اغتسلت أحرف الآي بالدمع ..
كان الهلال تُعرجنه الغيمة الآفلة
وترتيلةُ الدمع ترغو رُغاء الجنائب،
والمعصراتُ انعقدن حناناً من الوحي
والليلُ في إثره الليلُ..

كلبهمو بالوصيد اشأبت معاطسه:
خاتلته الرؤى.. فالطرائدُ بارقة
والسوانحُ سائبة في مدى الدؤ؟!
ريحاً من الريح يطوي المسافات:
عمقُ السّماء نباح
ومتّسعُ الكون ضيغُ العواءِ المرجّع،

في الفجر يلقي طريدته بالوصيد:
هريرٌ من الغضب المستباح،
وكانت صديرةً يتوقدُ بين زخارفها
ما تبقّى من الدم والصرخة الزلزلة..

٩١/٤/١٣، معتقل طرة

BLOOD DRIPPING FACES

"A poem of an inconclusive nature"

Departing are they or is it you parting?
Or are they delusive residents in wind-blown quarters?
No gossip hunt extends to articulate
And silence is but a dispersed soul among ancient ruins!
O lord weeping at the doorsteps of poetry:
Is it a tune wrought by its own blood?
Is it earth kneaded into an abysmal rhythm
and an improvised meter?
These are the ruins of the dictionary left us by our forefathers
Was the alphabet about to blow grit
Unto the lofty horizon, but was swept before the visions start?
Is this language? Are you the last babble of its speakers?
Or are you the preverbal mutter of forefathers' cravings
And a lightning in clay's progeny to be revealed?
Depart, prince of a land you cease to recognize
Depart, prince of lays' rimes exuding inspired satires,
From their sunny effusions shy the corrupt.
The knotted shroud --scraps of alliances
turned into banners-- drops:
Eminence without honour
And the people shuddering in plain disgrace
While the effete luxury is unharmed in an age of
pandering newspapers



وجوهها يتنطفئ الدم

«قصيدة من طبيعتها ألا تكتمل»

الراحلون همو أم أنتَ مرتحل
أم هم إقامة ظنٍ في مرابعه تسفي الرياحُ
فلا صيدُ النخيمة يمتدُّ الكلامُ به،
والصمتُ محضُ شتاتِ الروح في دمن الأحقاب !
يا ملكاً يبكي على عتباتِ الشعرِ:
هل نغمُ إزميله دمه؟
هل طينةُ جبلتْ تفعيلةٌ لججاً والبحرُ مرتجلُ!

هذي خرائبُ ما تحوي المعاجمُ مما خلفَ السلفُ
هل أبجديتهم كانت ستعصفُ صلصالاً إلى
الأفق الأعلى وقبل بدايات الروى انعصفوا!
هل هذه لغةٌ أم أنتَ آخرُ لغوِ التاطقين بها
أم أنتَ من ظمأ الأجداد هممةٌ قبل الكلام
وبرقُ في سلالة طين سوف ينكشفُ!
فاخرجُ أميرَ بلادٍ بتَ تنكرها
واخرجُ أميرَ قوافٍ من نشاندها يرقصُ وحي هجاءٍ
طالما استترت من شمسهِ الجيفُ
واساقطَ الكفنُ المعقودُ من خرقِ الأحلافِ ألويةً:
مجدٌ ولا شرفُ
والشعبُ تحتِ عراءِ العارِ يرتجفُ!
قد يسلمُ الترفُّ المأبونُ في زمنٍ ديوثه الصحفُ

Here you are under electric lashes in chains and pitch darkness:

--: "Will you confess?"

--: "... That dogs are kings and kings are puppets

That the land is swept by foreign armies."

Depart banished from a country you

Slaved plowing it,

Leave its heritage of pock-marked cities, of ant-hills

Glittering with false dawn, ornate with fraud and hunger,

Rub your forehead with oblivion,

Hasten to the shed of your spilled blood.

Oozing blood --after blindfolding you-- drips

The bound eyes are filled with flowing blood flashing

Figures of loved ones and cherished books:

Addas offers a gift of grapes to the thirsty and wounded one

The vine breaks up into shades and fresh dew,

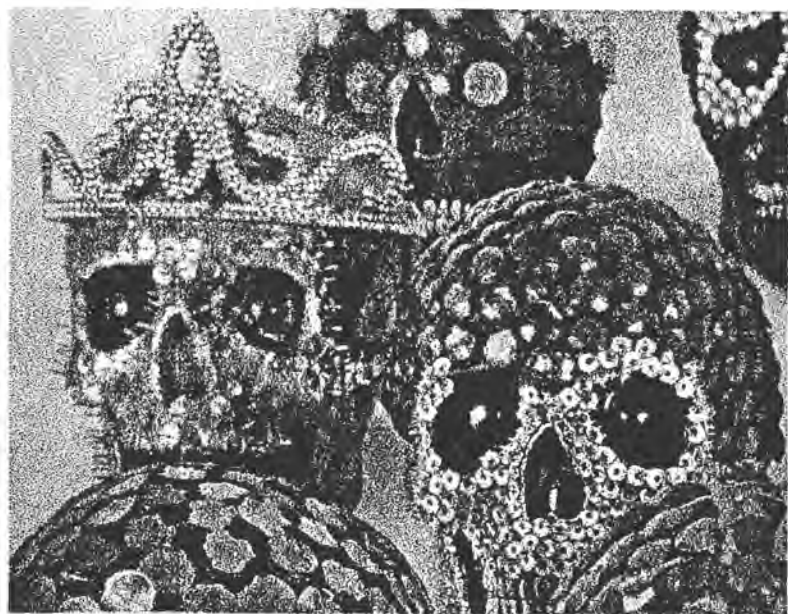
Rub of salt in the wound, light flashing. In the glimmer

of its twinkles

Henna-coloured images toppling, calls of

Verses resounding blissfully,

Mercy in the Prophet's dewy voice.



Carlos Zerpa, *Crowned Death*, detail, Galeria Ramis Barquet, Mexico

ها أنت تحت سياط الكهرباء وبين القيد والظلمات السود:
-: تعترف؟

-:.. إن الكلاب ملوك، والموك دمي،
والأرض تحت جيوش الروم تنجرف
فاخرج طريد بلاد كنت تحرثها
حرث العبيد،

وغادر إرثها مدناً مجدورة بعشاش النمل
ساطعة الفجر الكذب بكلس الزيف والسغب
وامسح جبينك بالنسيان وابتدر المنهل من
دمك النضاح:

راعقه من بعد ما عصبوا عينيك ينتطف
فالعين يملؤها من ومضه السرب

أشباح ما عشق المعصوب من بشر ولوا ومن كتب:
«عداس» يمنح مجروحاً على ظمأ هدياً من العنب
والكرمة انفرطت ظلاً ومس ندى

والجرح ملح دم فالضوء بارق ومض في لعابه
تهوي مخايل حناء وصرخة آيات تجلجل تشوباً
ومرحمة في صوته الرطب

Jusoor – The celebrations of the savage mummy

A horizon of bloodied sand and a head bearing witness to Islam
Clouds patched, water recalled in the mist
From Al-Husayn's testimony,
The inscribed arboreal step in his blood
Toppling... I gather the nectar from its buds.

The Delphic Shaykh of midwives, hostage of rabble wrangles
Listens to the roaring waves, awaiting an echo
Of his deadline's trumpet to sound
Releasing the soul from the body:
The noble gesture, sparklings in his hand
And the hemlock, melted death in the poisonous goblet,
Purifying memory in its course,
Buried eternity is revealed in Time's balcony.

In the horror of torture, I pushed my hand cuffs
They wrenched more..and in a droplet hanging
under my eyelids
Allah's heaven crumbled.. I held the martyr's head
With my bleeding wounds deep inside me.

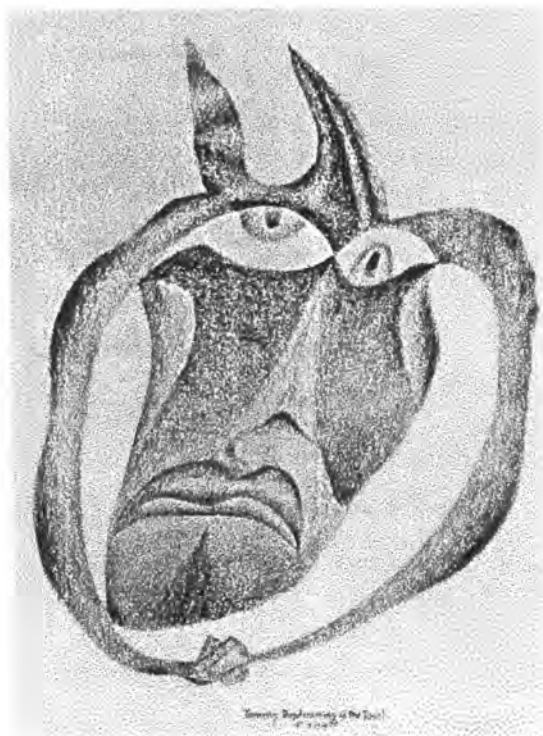


Francisco Goya, *The Disasters of War*, British Museum

أَفَقُّ التَّجِيعَ وَرَأْسٌ مِنْ تَشْهَدِ
رَتَقُ الْغَيُومَ وَرَجْعُ الْمَاءِ فِي السَّحَبِ
كَانَ الْحُسَيْنَ..
وَكَانَتْ خَطْوَةُ الشَّجَرِ الْمَكْتُوبِ فِي دَمِهِ
تَهْوِي.. فَأَلْقَفُ نَسْفًا مِنْ بَرَاعِمِهِ..

شَيْخُ الْقَوَابِلِ مِنْ «دَلْفِي» إِلَى شَغَبِ الْغَوْغَاءِ مَرْتَهَنُ
يَصْفِي إِلَى صَخْبِ الْأَمْوَاجِ.. عَلَّ صَدْيُ
مِنْ بَوَاقِ مَوْعِدِهِ
يَدْوِي فَيَطْلُقُ أَسْرَ الرُّوحِ فِي الْجَسَدِ:
نُبْلُ الْإِشَارَةِ ضَوْءٌ شَعَّ مِنْ يَدِهِ
و«الشَّيْكَرَانُ» بِكَأْسِ السَّمِّ ذَوْبٌ رَدَى
يَصْفُو التَّذَكُّرَ فِي مَسْرَاهِ
فَالْأَزْلُ الْمَطْمُورُ مِنْكَشَفٌ فِي شُرْفَةِ الْأَبَدِ..

زَحْزَحْتُ فِي هَلَعِ التَّعْذِيبِ قَيْدَ يَدِي
فَاشْتَدَّ.. وَانْهَدَمْتُ -فِي قَطْرَةٍ عُلِقَتْ تَحْتَ الْجَفُونِ-
سَمَاءَ اللَّهِ.. فَالْتَقَفْتُ رَأْسَ الْقَتِيلِ
جُرُوحُ الصَّدْعِ فِي كَبِدِي..

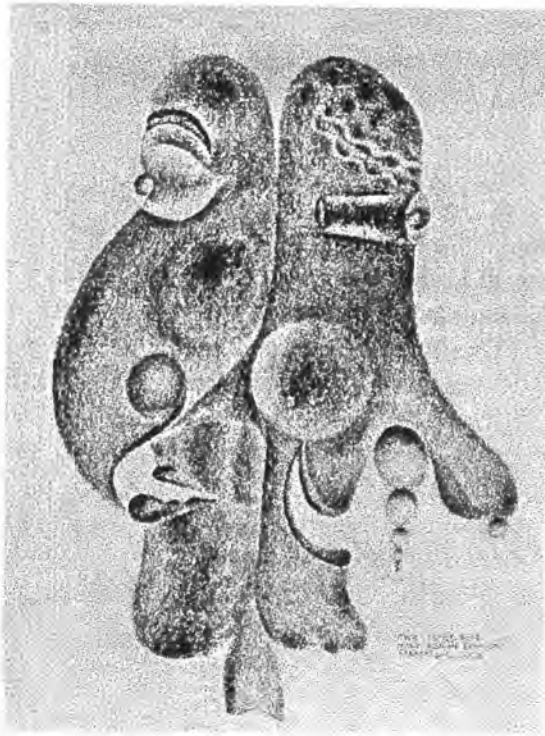


Kurt H. Wolff, *Daydreaming of the Devil, Kairos*

The Shaykh lies in the beast's saddlebag,
Corpse balanced by the dangling books,
The textual commentaries silent.

Jurists' tears in the palms of Cordova
Held back only by the roamings of Ibn Arabi
Between soul's revelations and the latent flame
in creation's glory,
Inundated by sand or the downpourings of fiery water.

His hands ripped death's swaddling,
making nomadism's fire flare
In the parchment of *Al-Muqaddimah*. I called
upon the salt of my blood:
--: "Is this bloodshed until Doom's Day?"



Kurt H. Wolff, *Two Souls, alas! Have Fled My Trembling Breast*, Kairos

والشيخُ يرقدُ في خُرجِ الأثانِ
وعدلُ الجثّةِ انهدلتُ أسفاره،
فمتونُ الشرحِ صامتةٌ،
والفقه يدمعُ في راحاتِ «قرطبة»
ليست تكفكفهُ إلا سياحةُ «محيي الدين» بين
فتوح الروح واللهب المكنون تحتَ جلال الخلقِ
من شرقِ الرَّمْلِ أو بهطولِ الماءِ متقدِّ
شقت يدها قماطُ الموتِ فاندلعتْ نارُ البداوةِ في
رقٍ «المقدمة».. استصرختْ ملحَ دمي:
- هذي الدماءُ إلى يومِ القيامةِ !؟

Al-Niffari said: "Yea"

"A grief may keep wakeful all night"

"The lad's eyes in contrasting views"

"In seeking stillness, grief disturbs his peace"

"He is unable to focus on problems when he tries"

"Perplexed, the only steady stroller among his wills"

"Is blindness resembling dark curtained night".

Depart, stripped, without hope or fear

Seek refuge in despair from temptations and delusions
of old times

Gallop in the midday heat of mirages

In whose fancies glitter fluttering flags on the horizon

O lord weeping at the doorsteps of poetry:

Is it a tune wrought by its own blood?

Then gallop.. the soul's desert is vast,

Death is a gazelle of rime, perhaps its main will be slit open

To shed these faces in your eyes.

—: "Is this bloodshed until Doom's Day?"

The departing said: "Yea"

Then ascend to a twilight of bloodied clouds

And gush when a rime is strewn between the chains
and the flogger.

قال النَّفَرِيُّ: أَجَلُ
 « ياربُّ هَمِّ تَبَيَّتُ اللَّيْلَ سَاهِرَةً
 عَيْنُ الْفَتَى مِنْهُ وَالْأَرَاءُ فِي خُلْفِ
 إِنْ رَامَ هُدًى أَثَارَ الْهَمِّ هَدَأَتْهُ
 أَوْ رَامَ وَقْفًا عَلَى الْأَشْجَانِ لَمْ يَقِفِ
 حَيْرَانًا لَا يَتَهَادَى بَيْنَ عِزْمَتِهِ
 إِلَّا عَمَى مِثْلُ جَنْحِ اللَّيْلِ ذِي السَّدْفِ »
 فَاخْرُجْ بِعُرْيِكَ لَا تَأْمُلْ وَلَا تَخَفْ
 وَادْرَأْ بِبِأْسِكَ مَا كَانَ الزَّمَانُ بِهِ يُغْوِي وَيُوْهِمُ
 وَارْكُضْ فِي هَجِيرِ سَرَابٍ طَالَمَا التَّمَعْتُ
 مِنْهُ السَّمَادُ أَعْلَامًا مَرْفُوفَةً فِي الْأَفْقِ..
 يَا مُلْكًا يَبْكِي عَلَى عَتَبَاتِ الشَّعْرِ:
 هَلْ نَغْمٌ إِزْمِيلُهُ دَمُهُ!
 فَارْكُضْ.. فَإِنْ فَلَاةُ الرُّوحِ وَاسِعَةٌ
 وَالْمَوْتُ ظَهْرِي قَوَافٍ رُبَّمَا انْفَتَقَتْ مِنْهُ الْجَوَارِحُ فِي
 عَيْنَيْكَ فَانْهَمَلْتَ هَذِي الرُّجُوهُ
 -: « فَهَلْ هَذِي الدَّمَاءُ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ! »
 قال الرَّاحِلُونَ: أَجَلٌ..

فَاعْرِجْ إِلَى شَفَقٍ دَامِي السَّحَابِ
 وَاهْطُلْ كُلَّمَا انْتَشَرَتْ بَيْنَ السَّلَاسِلِ وَالْجَلَادِ قَافِيَةٌ..

حيز لا طرغلي ١٩٩١/٣/١٢

معتقل طرة

رملة الأنجب

بنغازي ١٩٩١/٧/٧

محمد عفيفي مطر



ESTRANGEMENT OF SPIRIT

Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab (1926-1964), an Iraqi poet of paramount importance in modern Arabic literature, remains unfamiliar to western readers. Despite a tremendous output of poetry, few poems have been translated into foreign languages and some of his longer poems have been completely ignored. "Stranger at the Gulf", one of the longer and most known of his poems in Arabic literature, has not been translated into English. "O Estrangement of Spirit", "The Wind Knocks Upon the Door" and "The Last Night", shorter and less known, combine with "Stranger at the Gulf" to expose, with equal intensity, an experience of alienation and exile.

Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab is famous in Arabic literature for poetry echoing the decline of traditional frameworks in the Arab world with the emergence of a new form of poetry which departs from conventional forms by dispensing with mono-rhyme and a conventional meter, for reflecting an influence of western poets such as Shelley, Keats and T. S. Eliot and for combining an Arab and western heritage. Al-Sayyab writes in the spirit of a native of Jaikur, in southern Iraq, to which he frequently alludes in his poems, and a political dissident who suffers in exile which becomes a major theme in his poetry.

Some of the main events in Al-Sayyab's life which influenced his poetry tremendously are the death of his mother in 1932, who merges in the poet's subconscious with Iraq for whose loss he grieves in the four poems, and his political exile in 1953 for embracing Communist ideology in the late 1940's, which "Stranger at the Gulf", written in Kuwait, commemorates, and his illness and medical treatment in London during which the three shorter poems were written. Al-Sayyab's poetry, in general, echoes the anguish of an orphan born and reared in a rural environment, an impoverished student in the city, a political refugee in Kuwait and a patient in London.

The main themes which Al-Sayyab explores are the agony of political alienation and exile and the horror of social disintegration. "Stranger at the Gulf", "O Estrangement of Spirit", "The Wind Knocks Upon the Door" and "The Last Night" illustrate different aspects of the same experience of alienation and exile.

"Stranger at the Gulf" (1953) constitutes the product of a personal experience which Al-Sayyab's realism transforms into an awareness of a collective situation of political and economic exploitation and social disintegration in Iraq. The poem represents a response to the horrors of oppression by a totalitarian regime and the cruelty of political persecution which culminate in exile. A stranger seated on the shore of the Gulf, crowded with sails fluttering in the wind, which pursues the moving ships, in the afternoon heat, facing his naked and barefooted fellow countrymen toiling on the other bank, hears roaring waves and shrieking wind which paradoxically echo his grief and emphasize his separation from his homeland. Melancholy is woven in a string of unfolding memories and emotions which become a living song as a phonograph record turns in a temporary deviation from reality with visions of a mother's face in the darkness while she whispers stories to her sleepy son, date palms producing fear of ghosts in a young boy at night and an old woman relating the legendary love story of

'Urwa Ibn al-Hazam and Afraa', women assembling to relate historical and romantic stories and men spending nights in chatter and boisterous laughter.

Al-Sayyab compares the stranger's desire to return to his homeland to blood propelled in his veins by yearning, hunger of a drowning body's blood for air, a newborn impatiently awaiting birth by craning its head from its mother's body and a dream of sleep on a pillow sprinkled with dew bearing the scent of Iraq. The political refugee becomes a Christ dragging his cross, a beggar stretching out a dewy palm, yellowed by degradation and sickness in an inhospitable country, a hungry wanderer, unable to pay a passenger's fee on a ship bound for his homeland and travelling barefoot in search of food, rags fluttering in the wind and blood gushing from bruised feet. The image of the stranger wandering in a boat traversing the Gulf, illuminating his window on the other bank of the Gulf with the sparkle of increasing money and awakening on the day of his departure with renewed energy and strength, dismissing his light sleep with a yawn and donning his traveller's clothes, represents an imaginary realization of the dream. The vision is quickly obliterated by the stranger's realization of the futility of hope and dreams.

"O Estrangement of Spirit" (1963) echoes a heart-wrenching cry of despair in a world lacking Iraq's warmth and peace with the absence of a bright sun, a limitless stretch of land stirring a poetic imagination, fruit-bearing palm trees and intimate conversations by the fireplace. A sense of alienation haunts Al-Sayyab with images of a long distance from Iraq in which eyes pant breathlessly, a sail moving in the direction of his homeland and a butterfly spreading darkness to obscure the poet's vision. Al-Sayyab shifts from a gloomy picture of life in exile to a vision of his wife awaiting his knock upon the door at dawn and dismissing her sleepiness in a welcoming kiss.

"The Wind Knocks Upon the Door" (1963) presents the poet's experience of exile from a third angle. The stranger sitting at the Gulf, facing his homeland, and the traveller

returning to a waiting wife are shown as a stranger behind a door struck by the palm of his homeland which blows passionate kisses in the wind, disappears behind a wall erected with no doors and windows and visits the poet as a spirit borne by the wind. Al-Sayyab inverts reality as he imagines his homeland as the stranger setting out on a road of no return, bidding no farewell to wailing children and returning as a ghost with familiar features. The poem reflects a certain ambivalence as the poet's sense of loneliness, produced when only the wind knocks upon his door, coincides with a hopefulness in discovering the spirit of his homeland, a mother searching for her son in ports and train stations, in the wind.

"The Last Night" (1963) develops the scene of the poet's return to his homeland which he paints sketchily in "Stranger at the Gulf" and "O Estrangement of Spirit". Al-Sayyab conjures up the image of the patient returning from London, where he undergoes medical treatment, carrying suitcases full of wonders for his young son whose tears for a distant father fill his dreams while the moon, for which his father longs, kisses his face in sleep. The poet imagines his wife lighting the lamps and kindling the fire in anticipation of his return and his son leaping at his appearance to touch his hair and garments. The poem ends on a note of exasperation as the poet awaits the end of his final night in London.

Tahia Khaled Abdel Nasser

* **Tahia Khaled Abdel Nasser:** was educated in Europe and Egypt. She is presently a student of English and Comparative Literature at the American University in Cairo. She writes short stories and poetry in English.

* **Picture Credits:** Afaq Arabiya 76,77; Jane English 82; Wahbi Al-Hariri 78; Ramzi Sa'eed 75, 79.



STRANGER AT THE GULF

*Translated by
Tahia Khaled Abdel Nasser*

Stranger at the Gulf

The wind pants with midday heat, like a nightmare,
in late afternoon
And on the ship's sails settles or scatters for setting out,
The Gulf crowded with exhausted sea travellers,
Half-naked and barefooted.
And on the sand, and at the Gulf
Sat the stranger, perplexed eyes roaming the Gulf,
Demolishing the light beams with heaving sobs.
Louder than waves tumbling foam and the noise,
A sound blasted in the depths of my heart
bereaved like a mother at the loss of her child: Iraq,
Like water rising, like a cloud, like the tears in the eyes.
The wind screams at me: Iraq,
And the waves wail at me: Iraq, Iraq, only Iraq!
The sea as vast as it is and you as distant as you are,
And the sea between you and me, O Iraq.
Yesterday when I passed by the cafe, I heard you, Iraq..
And you were a record turning
The turning of planets moulding my life, winding time
In two moments, out of place.
My mother's face in the dark

And her voice, sliding with visions till I sleep;
The date palms I fear when blackened with sunset
Laden with ghosts snatching children
In the alleys;
The old woman, delousing, whispering the
 story of Hazam
How his grave slit open before the beautiful Afraa'
And enveloped her...excluding her hair.
You, a beauty...Do you remember?
The palms of warmth seekers crowding
 in our blazing light?
And my aunt's subdued speech of by-gone kings?
And behind the door like divine decree
Closed on the women
By hands obeyed, because they are the hands of men,
The men used to pass the night unceasingly in noisy
 chatter and bickering.
Do you remember? Do you remember?
Our happiness and contentment
With those sad stories because they are the
 stories of women.
The two of us the vigour of a throng of lives and times,
The pivots of its existence.
Is that not nothing but dust?
A dream and a record turning?
The only remains and no consolation?
I loved the spirit of Iraq in you or loved you in its spirit;
The two of you the light of my spirit--evening came
And night descended, so radiate in its gloom
 that I do not go astray.
The reunion would not be complete if you came to me
 in exile!
The meeting with you and Iraq is the reunion!
Yearning jolts my blood to it, as if my blood is all
 craving,
Hunger for it...like the hunger of the drowning's

blood for air.

The newborn's eagerness when craning his head
from the darkness of the womb!

I wonder at treason!

Can a man betray his country?

How could he exist if he betrayed the meaning of
his existence?

The sun more beautiful in my country than in others,
and the darkness--

Even the darkness--is more beautiful there,
for it embraces Iraq.

What a pity! When do I sleep

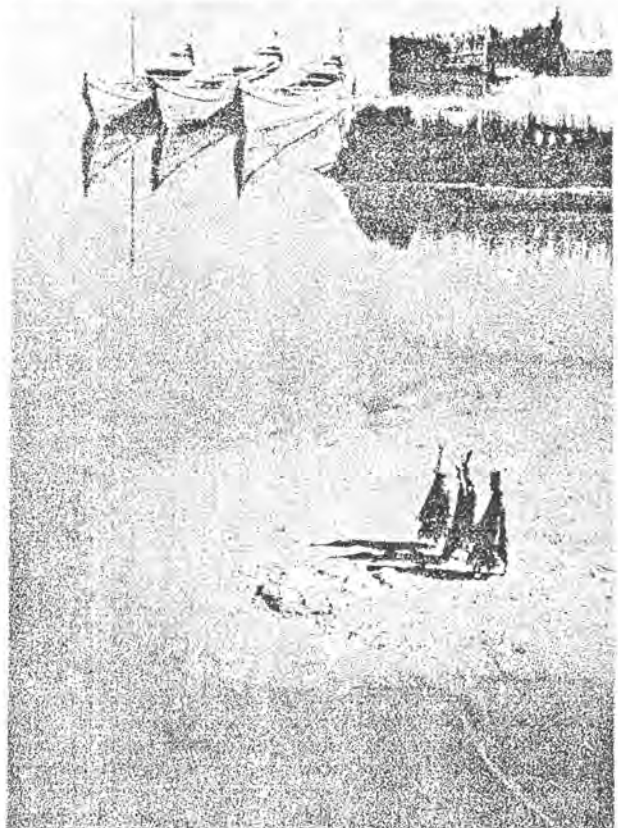
To feel on the pillow

Your summer night dew bearing the scent of Iraq?

My footsteps between the fearful villages and
foreign cities

I extolled your beloved earth,

And carried it for I am Christ dragging his cross in exile,



So I heard the thudding of the hungry's footsteps,
walking feet bleeding from stumbling,
Casting dust in my eyes from your earth
and their footsoles.
Dust-covered feet, hair dishevelled, I still rove
through the narrow alleys
Beneath the foreign suns,
Tattered garments fluttering, I stretch out a dewy hand
to beg
A hand yellowed by degradation and fever,
the degradation of a strange beggar
Before foreign eyes,
Before contempt. And disapproval, and aversion...or pity,
And death is more tolerable than pity,
Than that pity wrung out from foreign eyes
Drops of mineral water!
So trickle, you, you drops, you blood, you...money,
O wind, O needles sewing me the sail--when do I return
To Iraq? When do I return?
O sparkle of waves rocked by an oar rowing
Me across the Gulf, and you big planets...you money!



If only ships charged passengers no fee
Or if only the earth was the broad horizon, with no seas!
Money, I still calculate, count and increase you,
I still reduce the period of my exile with you,
With your sparkle I still light my window and door
On the other bank over there, so speak to me, O money
When do I return? When do I return?
Will that happy day approach before my death?
I will awake on that morning, and in the sky
 fragments of clouds,
And an August-scented chill in the breeze;
And I will dismiss, with a yawn, the remains
 of my drowsiness like a flimsy silk curtain
Revealing the visible and the invisible:
The forgotten and barely unforgotten,
 and a doubt in certainty.
And I will discover--as I stretch out my hands
 to wear my clothes--
The answer I was seeking in the darkness of my soul.
Why does surreptitious happiness fill the recesses of
 my soul like fog?
Today--and overwhelming joy gushes over me--I return!

Alas...for I will not return to Iraq!
Does the destitute return?
And how can money be saved when
 you eat when hungry?
And when you spend the money granted by the
 generous, on food?
So weep for Iraq
For you only have the tears
And the futile waiting for the winds and the sails!

Kuwait-1953

O Estrangement of Spirit

O estrangement of spirit in a world of stone
And ice and tar and steel and anger,
O estrangement of spirit...no sun for me to radiate
And no horizons
For my imagination to fly at dawn.
Fire illuminating cold desolation, burning
Distances, drawing me near, without travel,
From the palm trees of Jaikur I pluck the nearest fruit.
Fire without evening chats
Only conversations from a past bursting
Like the rustle of leaves
Echoes remaining in ears, weeping without trees.
O estrangement of spirit in a world of stone.

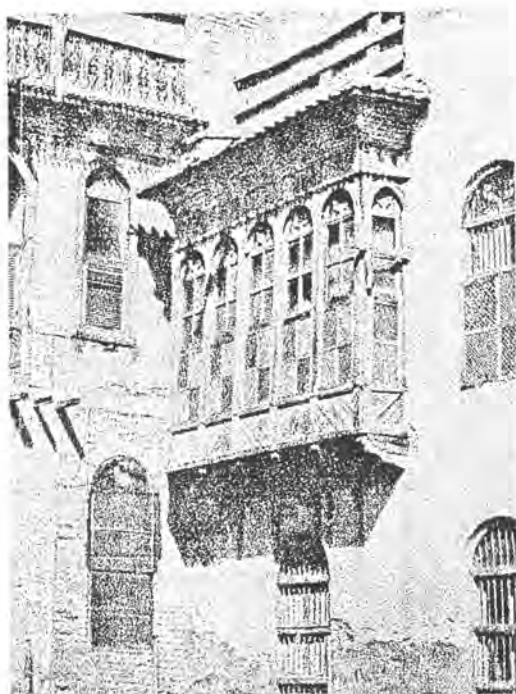
All my horizons closed with black buildings,
And eyes were panting on the shores of my heaven
 like a bird crushed by travel:
The river
And a tilted sail in the twilight
 shaking the dimmed brightness,
Spreading as river and twilight tremble,
A world of lanterns on the two shores burning,
One butterfly after another scatters duskiness
on the two wings...till eyes pant.

Love was the dazzling of the spirit whispering
To another spirit, bearing in the palm of its hand
A store of innumerable treasures.
Love is not a crush in the body's quern
Neither supper nor wine of fervour
Languid while legs intertwine in passion
Beneath tables hiding the intoxication of mankind
From God's intoxication in whispers and evening chat
In the moon's tent.

O estrangement of spirit, no spirit to love.

If not for the shadows of a past leaking out
Like sleep washed with exhaustion
Vexation has left
No smile for a spouse I would meet
If I returned from the alienation of exile; it is dawn
And dream like dew wetting the flowers
Touching two eye-lids of light and spilling
In the spirit, pleasing or troubling
My knock slipped to the door, regaining
Consciousness as it slumbers then retreats,
And dream spread curtains to hide her
And twitched her eye-lids
As if touched by my hands knocking upon the door: "Ah!
Who has knocked upon my door? Is that you, my dear?"
And the drowsiness left by her vigil melted in my kiss,
For she blooms
Like a flower opening its eyes at dawn.

London 26/2/1963



The Wind Knocks Upon the Door

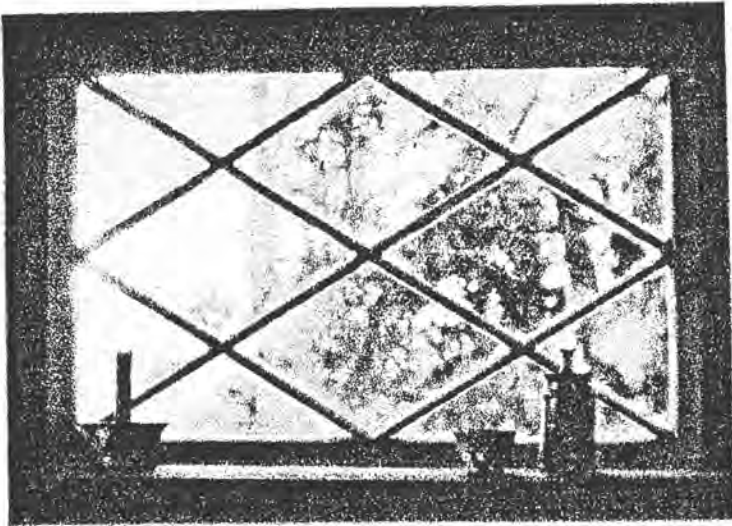
Only the wind knocked upon the door in
the impenetrable night,
The palm of your hand did not knock upon the door.
Where is your palm in the long road?
Seas between us, cities, deserts of darkness
Whence the wind carries the echo of kisses like fire
Leaping from one palm tree to another and glowing
in the clouds.

Only the wind knocked upon the door...
Ah, perhaps a spirit in the wind
Started to pass by ports or train stations
To question strangers about me,
about a stranger who the day before
Walked on foot, and today crawls with broken spirit.
The spirit of my mother moved by a deep love,
Motherly love for she weeps:
"Ah, my son distant from his home!
Woe unto him! How can you return alone,
without a guide or a companion?"

Mother...I wish you had not disappeared
behind a wall of stone
No door to knock upon and no windows in the wall!
How did you set out in a road where travellers
do not return
From a yellow darkness like the dusk of seas?
How did you set out without a farewell for
the children wail,
Running on the road and, terrified, return
And ask the night about you and await your return?
The wind knocks upon the door, your spirit,
perhaps, visiting
This stranger! Your somniac son burned by longing.
Mother, I wish you return as
A ghost. And how can I fear it when years
have not erased
Your features from my imagination?
Where are you? Do you hear
Screams of a heart slaughtered by longing for Iraq?

The wind knocks upon the door, blown from an
eternal separation.

London 13/3/1963



The Last Night

And in the morning, O city of fog
As the sun, a consumptive's wish, turns a heavy head
From cracks in the clouds,
The ailing traveller will carry
What illness has left of his wasted body
And leave smoke and iron
And leave asphalt and stone.
Perhaps he will behold in Durham a river,
Behold God's face, His new face
In the world of money, wine and partying.

Possibly one morning, after a month...after the doctor
Sees him--who knows what fate conceals?--
He will carry a suitcase full
Of thousands and thousands of strange wonders,
Of jewels and precious stones,
Of hidden toys
To surprise Ghaylan--O, how long he has waited!
O, how long he has wept and slept, tears filling
At a bell's toll or a wolf's cry
His dream worlds, and sails unfurl

As Sinbad roams a world of peril:
There a knight of brass watches the waves
And aims an arrow at everyone who crosses!

If God wills my return to Iraq
I will kiss the moist earth, embrace the trees,
And cry out to mankind:
"O fragrance of paradise, O brothers, O comrades,
Al-Hassan Al-Basry toured exotic islands
And the London of iron and rock,
And found no better life than in Iraq".
What a long night and a cruel insomnia's knife
Rusty, slashing my eyes into daybreak!
And my wife does not put out the lamplight:
 "He might return
In the darkness of night from his travels".
She kindles the fire in its hearth: "night is chilly
And he loves warmth and evening chat".

* * *

And my heating stove dies out, so I kindle the flame
And remember Iraq: I wish the beloved moon
Hurls itself at me from Iraq's horizon: O moon
Have you not kissed the face of Ghaylan?
Does your kiss of Ghaylan suffice for
 the stranger that I am?

 To spread

Your light through the window of a despondent father
Landing on his mouth and hair:
I feel Ghaylan (fragrance and perfume
 diffused from his soft palm)
Fiddling with my hair as he calls out:
"O my father has returned from the city of stone!"
And pulls my garments.
What a long night and a cruel insomnia's knife
And the knife of a sleep without a moon!

London 4/1/1963



Prayer by Ben Shahn, Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach

مَا جَنَيْنَا
WHAT HAVE WE GOT
Daniel Moore (Abd al-Hayy)
دانيال مور (عبدالحى)
ترجمة نويل عبد الواحد

1

What have we got in fact that is truly
ours but a few square vertical stones,
black wooden rooster on a stick, windows made of
cardboard and ruin, memories of stairways, memories of
memories of stairways, distant sound of
buzz-saws in the rain,
blunt pencils, nubs, ball-point pens needing refills,
drawings of a sheep with three legs under a cloud,
piles of broken bicycles, elegant
posture when we remember, slumped despair when we
forget, our
own personal

١

ما نملكه، نملكه حقاً
بضعة أحجار شاهقة مربعة،
ديك خشبي أسود، ونوافذ من
كرتون وخراب، ذكرياتُ سلالم، ذكرياتُ
من ذكرياتِ سلالم، وعزيفُ
المناشير بعيداً تحت المطر،
أقلامُ رصاص مثلومة،
نتوءات
أقلامُ حبر ناشف مكورة وفارغة،
رسوماتُ لخروف بثلاث قوائم تحت سحابة،
أكوام من الدراجات المحطمة، ما أروع
أن نتذكر، ما أشقى أن ننسى،
ما يخلصنا

Jusoor – What have we got

despair pounding with nerves' jackhammers along personal
finger-bones, makes our
glib jaws quiver, we have our
eyes in the morning, we still have them
when the hazy sun goes down, a
night that throws its sparkling thorny cloak over our necks,
we have neon maps spread out on
night-tables, visions of voyages,
black & white tempests in boiling seas, half-naked
natives hiding in leaves, holier
lands, we have
shirts ripped open at the collar, sleeves ending in
labyrinthine brocade telling prehistoric tales in
pictures microscopically inlaid,
collections of knobs from cabinet doors in houses we
have known,
we have nowhere to go now
but up, one of meaning's
curling stairways or up into the stellar upholstery of the
head where I seem to spend
much of my time dreaming



John Martin, detail from *The Last Man*, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

اليأس
ثقباً صخر تثلم الأعصاب
تسحق عظم الإصبع، ترجّ الفكين
لنا عيوننا في الصباح، وماتزال
هذه العيون لنا
عندما تغيب الشمس الكابية،
ويرمي الليل على رقابنا عباءته الشوكية الوهاجة،
لنا خرائط النيون مفروشة
على موائد الليل، رؤى أسفار،
عواصف سوداء وبيضاء في بحار هوج، مواطنون
أشباه عراة يتوارون بين أوراق الشجر، بلاد
أعظم قداسة، لنا

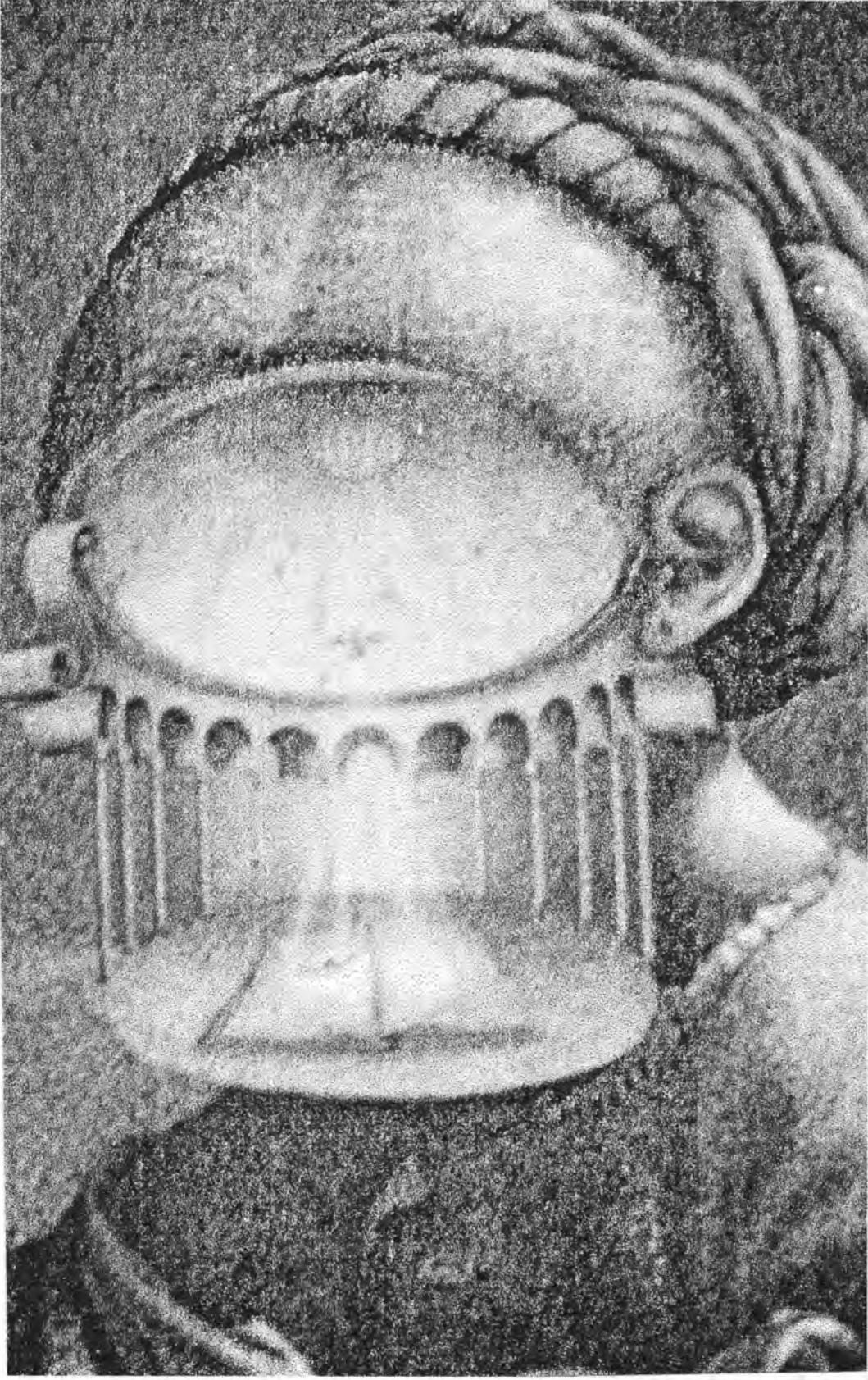
قمصان قُدت من ياقاتهما، تصب أكامها
في متاهات من التقصيب، تروي بالصورة
ذات الترصيع المرهف، حكايا من ما قبل التاريخ،
مجموعات من مقابض أبواب الخزائن لبيوت نعرفها،
ولا ملاذ لنا الآن

إلا في العلو، في سلم من سلال المعنى
اللولبية أو في ركن التنجيد النجمي من الرأس
هكذا يلوح لي أنني أمضي سحابة وقتي حالما
بعوالم أفضل
من هذا العالم، لا باب لها، لا نعل، لا عظام،

better worlds than
this one, doorless, shoeless, skeletonless, in a
perfect place that the more clearly you imagine it the more
clearly it becomes *this one*, perfection's
crystals squeeze between
molecules, shine thin
rays at first between cracks in the
seamless continuity of
matter, finally take over in one
sudden outburst, old streets become
bathed in
gold in the
eye of the beholder!

6/22/89

بعوالم أفضل
من هذا العالم، لا باب لها، لا نعل، لا عظام،
في مكان مثالي كلما صفا تخيلك له وراق
صفا وراق فيه لهذا العالم، بللور
الكمال يحشر بين خلاياه،
في البدء تشع خيوط النور الناحلة
من بين شقوق البنيان المرصوص
للمادة، وأخيرا تتفجر كليا في جيشان
شظايا القنبلة المفاجيء، وترى العين
أزقة عتيقة تغتسل
بالذهب!



2

We've got a diamond in the rough hidden in
deep flesh from the first
lodged in an inconspicuous pocket waiting for the
flap to be folded back to show its
glittering edge, a

true voice does it, excavates with tender mercy to
let illumination's fast facets
flash at last! We've got

nothing at all, and we've got this.

Each round-eye'd prenatal human being sucking miniature
thumb in dream amnesia, rolling in the
womb-ball through elongated
halls in pitch-dark, eyes seeing
lights in howling pre-creational comets passing
by, each of these nearly

shapeless creatures which later turn out to be *us*
in its own designer body, has this
diamond in a deep embedding that only needs to be
contacted alive to
come alive!

٢

ما جنينا ماسةً بكرٌ كانت خبيثة غائرة
في غياهب جسد، وظفرنا بها
هي من أول من آوى إلى جيب غامض
في انتظار أن يُكشف الحجاب من جديد
وينجلي وجهها الرواج

يجلوه صوت صادق
يكشف في النهاية بالرحمة اللطيفة
شعشة سطوحها! وما جنينا
سوى العدم، وقد جنيناها.

كل جنين إنساني جحظت عينه يلحق ابهاما لدنا
في حلم الذاكرة المفقودة،
يتدحرج في كرة الرحم عبر القاعات
الممتدة في العتم الفحمي. وعيون تبصر
الأضواء من مذنبات ما قبل-الخلق
تعبر وتولول. كل مخلوق

من هذه المخلوقات الهلامية تصبح بعدئذ نجر
بجسده المرسوم بذاته يملك ماسته
في الأعماق الغائرة، فلا تحتاج لتحيا
سوى لتماس حي.

Jusoor – What have we got

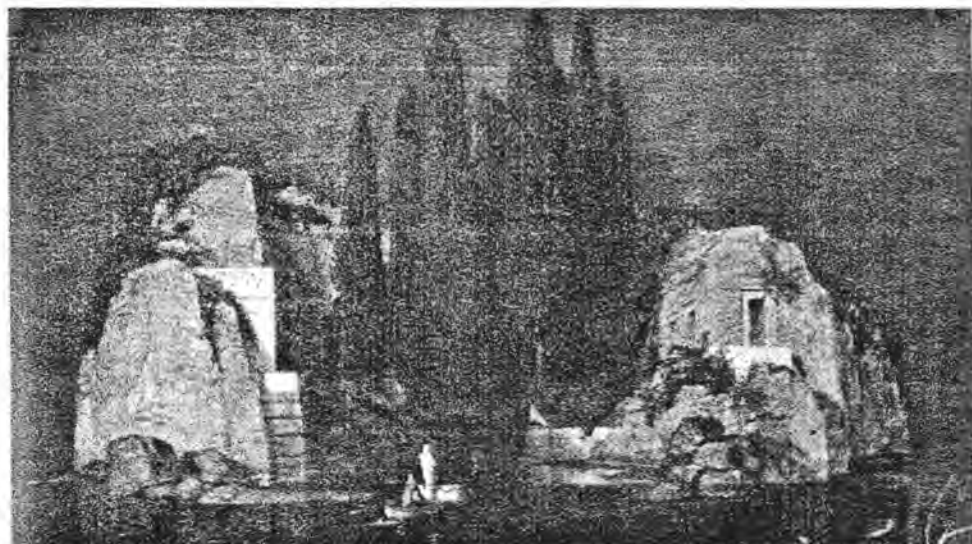
We've got
numerous numinous things
no numbering system can enumerate, yes we do –
we've got shadows that mimic our motions but
can't intimate real activity
going on in us, no face for it, no

voice, even with the very one we've got
immediately recognizable by long distance telephone,
Yes we do, we've got

something so splendid, when we walk
completely free of self's mannikins, icy wind running icy
fingers along
fleshless edges, shape

of the free soul
none can contain down along the
beach at low tide going serene where
wild waters once were, now only

solitary things left behind by the
long slurp of sea that



Arnold Böcklin, *The Isle of the Dead*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

و..لنا
ما لا يحصى من عالم الروح
ما لا يحسبه أي حساب، أجل لنا—
لنا أطيايف تحاكي حركاتنا لكنها
عاجزة عن كشف ما يصطخب فينا من حياة
لا وجه لها، لا

لا صوت، حتى صوتنا المميز عبر المهاتفة البعيدة
أجل، لنا
يا لروعة ما لنا، عندما ننتعق أحرارا
من دمی ذواتنا، وزمهریرُ الصقيع
عاصف بأعضاء تصقّعت
في حافات لا لحم لها، لنا شكل
الروح الحرة لا يكبحها أحد
على امتداد شاطئ صاف والمد متحسر بهدوء
عما كان مياها وحشية، لم يبق منها
غير بقايا عزلاء
خلفها طول المضغ الضوضائي لمياه البحر

counts its debris by putting
disappearing fortresses of tiny
bubbles around each
item in its slow retreat. We've got,
as a collective "we," a whole beach full of
uninteresting drift that is
civilization, inorganic things that
won't dissolve,
angular resilient shapes, hard rubber
parts, metallic bits, rusted
iron flanges that no longer
fit,

we've got 'em, yes we do,

aplenty!

6/28

مُحصية أنقاضها
في قلاع محوّة تبنيها
من فقاعات واهية
تحيط عند انحسارها البطيء
بكل حطام. هذا ما نحن جنينا
نجد بمعناها الجمعي، جنينا شاطنا كاملاً مختنقا بركام تافه هو
المضارة، يعج بلاعضويات لا تنحل ولا تتلاشى
أشكال رخوة حادة الزوايا، قطع من مطاط
صلب، نتف من معدن، ومفاصل من حديد صديء لا نفع لها
جنيناها . أجل جنيناها ،
دون حساب!



3

What have we got, you and me, in our
bodies like bodies of dark water moored to some
land, but inside the
round confines of their moving volumes, like
objects in fish-tanks, are all the
suns and moons of even
invisible galaxies, star-systems, pictographically
portrayed or not, spread like
webs across black, black space, their
forms echoing life in the stillness of all that
blackness.

We've got that. Close your eyes. We sink
immediately into the
heart. It is not some
emptied treasure-chest, it is a
crack in the
cold surface of
matter. Palpating
fissure sliced clean through into
fully-lit, crystal chandaliered halls that
open ice mountains
up inclines of expanding space.

٣

ماذا جنينا، أنا وأنت، في أجسادنا
التي تشبه أجسادا من ماء أسود يستنقع
في أرض ما، سوى أن في المحابس المغلقة
من قاماتها،

كأشياء متحركة في صفائح السمك
كل الشموس والأقمار في المجرات المرئية واللامرئية،
أنظمة لنجوم، كتبت بالصورة أم لم تكتب، منشورة
كبيوت العنكبوت في أرجاء فضاءات داكنة
تضج أشكالها بالحياة في سكون كل ذلك
القتام.

ذلك ما جنينا. أغمض عينيك، نفرق
حالا في أعماق القلب.
هذا ليس بصندوق الكنز المنهوب، بل
صدع في سطح المادة الباردة
صدع مفتوح بمهارة على قاعات تتوهج
بالنور المتلاشي من ثريات الكريستال
تطل على جبال جليدية تشهق
مع منحنيات الفضاء المتسع.

We've got that too.

Halls of revelry, halls of intrigue. Dimensionless halls of
sudden ecstatic outbursts by one
troubadour in particular whose
nearness to the Beloved has made him
lose all scruples. He
expresses his own heart
plain.

Wax on the walls drips by the
heat of his song.

Unlit candles
burst into flame.

6/29

4

Five o'clock in the morning after the
Morning Prayer on the
first day of two week's
notice of being "let go" from my
job of six years because they
can't afford to pay me anymore, what have I
got? Dear Lord,
You. Foremost. This
earth truly a
tiny place. The
heart holds all.

Five senses, light-filled. Clock-tick
near, distant
car-swish, this early. Pure dark outside.

ذلك ما جنينا أيضا.
قاعات العريضة، وقاعات الفحشاء السرية
قاعات لا أبعاد لها، تبغتنا بانفجارات وجد الثروبادور
حين يجعله القرب من المحبوب جسورا
فيبوح بكل وقيد القلب
ويذيب الشمع على الجدران بضرام غنائه
يشعل الشموع
فتأجج باللهب

٤

الخامسة صباحا بعد صلاة الفجر
في اليوم الأول من أسبوعي مهلة إنذار الطرد
من عملي، بعد سنين ست،
صرت على ميزانيتهم عبئا
ماذا جنيت؟ يا إلهي الحبيب
سبحانك. حقا إن الأرض
دائرة صغيرة جدا. ووحده القلب
وسع كل شيء.

خمس حواس مفعمة بالنور. أسمع «تكتكة»
الساعة قربي، سيارة تدار
من بعيد في هذه الساعة المبكرة، والظلام دامس هناك.



Wife, blue
 black starry skies shining
 silver behind her when she
 holds me and says she's
 with me no matter
 what, she
 her own world's proof and truth.
 Two children
 guaranteed blessing of provision by their
 very existence in our
 living domain, their
 personal sustenance
 written for them from
 before eternity, it materializes through
 thick and thin,
 seeks them out,
 finds them, feeds
 them. They

زوجتي
 سماء زرقاء السواد تشع باللجين وراهما
 حين تضمني وتقول إنها أبدا معي
 مهما جرى. زوجتي
 عالم البرهان والحقيقة الساطعة.
 طفلاي
 بورك في رزقهما الموفور
 وأوان انبثق الوجود بهما على تخوم حياتنا
 رزقهما مكتوب لهما من قبل
 أن يوجد الأبد، يجيء
 في السراء والضراء، يسعى إليهما
 يجدهما، يطعمهما.

طفلاي يتمتمان
في انبجاس قامتيهما
على شاشة تجدول الزمان
البهجة تترع وعيها المباغت، وجودهما الفريد
يفرشان قصاصات الضوء بأبعاد متعددة
في وضح النهار.
كنت في الأرض وكنت خارج الأرض
كنت أعلوها وكنت أهبطها، وكنت
أظل عاندا إلى هنا، أخط

واقفا، يا إلهي
بنعمة ناموسك وحده،
نكر ونفر أميالا وحشية
من طرقات القفار المكفهرة، ثم ننتهي
كل مرة في مكان من الأرض أليف.

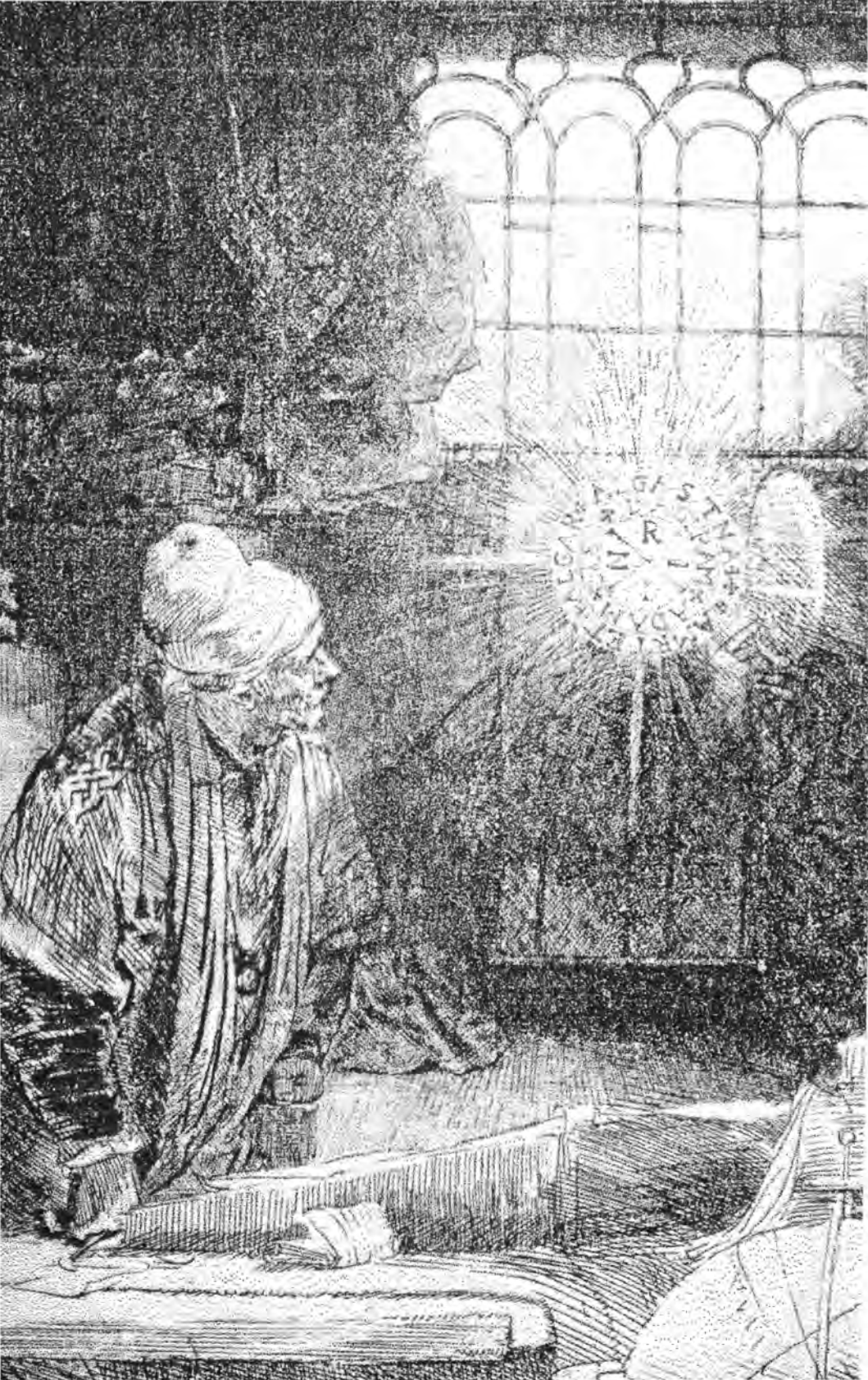


John Flaxman, *Taking the Bowl of Poison from the Spirit of Despair*,
Tolo Williams Collection, England

themselves
stutter in
growth-spurts on the
chronological movie-screen, joy in their
surprise consciousnesses, their
own unique beings throwing out
lights in cut-out shapes against
multiple dimensions in
broad daylight.

And I've been
in and out of the earth, up and
down on it, and
keep arriving
back at this point, landing

upright, Lord,
by Your
equilibrium alone, retrievable
miles unrollable inside of
more highway into dark wilderness, that
ends up in
familiar
territory each
time.



And this need to
write it down,
so that its
aroma remind somebody
passing under my
window _

my God! My window given at
birth, window
till death, same
window beyond, each
window each of us has
to see through, reach
through, breathe steam on the
flat glass pane of
to write our life-span out

of Your

pronounceable Name.

6/30

لا بد من تسجيل ما ذكرت لعل في أريجه
ذكرى لعابر تحت شباكي --

يا إلهي، يانا فذتي منذ الولادة
نافذتي حتى موتي، هي
نافذني بعد الموت، وهي
النافذة لكل منا ينظر منها ويصل
يزفر أنفاسا على وجه قطعة الزجاج ليكتب آجال حياتنا

من لدن جل إسمك.

5

What we've got from birth is
enough to go on.

Spiritual doorway

around us as we

go, reindeer herds of brown smoke
crowd around us, embroidered

pelts, sleet against our

own kind, we

trudge forward through

vast expanse.

No wealth greater than the

pure bond of depending on The Divine we've

got, no effort

of our own, makes

things clear, puts

things in their most

perfect place.

In the deep space of our

lives how could

any of us go it

alone? We're

electrically charged extensions of

Original Being. Isn't that

enough? Not just

shaggy shadows against Lascaux walls in

intestinal Primordia, shaking

ancient fingers making those

٥

ماجنيناه من الولادة
يكفيننا للإستمرار
بوابة روحانية
تكتشفنا ونحن نمضي
تزدحم حوالينا قطعان غبراء من أياثل الرنة
جلود مطرزة، وترمينا السماء بالبرد
نتهالك قُدُما في المدى الرحب.
ما أغنى كنز اتكالنا
على هبة السماء
فليس في حولنا
أو طولنا، بدونه
ما يستشف حقيقة الأشياء،
أو ينزلها في فلكها المناسب.

أنى لنا،
في فضاء حياتنا الشاسع العميق
أن نسافر دون زاد؟
نحن شحنة من فيض مبدع الوجود
أليس هذا حسبنا؟
ما على جدران كهوف «لاسكو»
ليس أشباحا محوة
كانت أنامل الأولين المرتجفة ترسم

bison icons against
stone humps deep
in the dark underground, forging
unhesitant connections between our-
selves and other
selves in earth's
symphonic animal patterning. Not that deep
recognizable imagery alone flickering orange and brown
in cavernous
twilight from the
very beginning, but something

fresher and more naked even than
that, that we are without question
thought-impulses around an enigmatic subject, our
flesh and all the
events in our
flesh ideas burst from
nowhere in a
glow of golden light with multiple faces on it,

non-stop action
activated by the
on-going Spirit of Mercy

without Whom we are nothing.

7/2

Daniel Moore (Abd al-Hayy)

في حال من البدائية الجوفية
أيقونات الشيران
على حديبات الصخر في جوف المغارات المعتمعة،
لتمد أواصر جريئة بين ذواتنا
وذوات أخرى في تشكيلات حيوانية سيمفونية
من تراب
هذه الرسوم وهي تمس أعماقنا
وترفرق منذ خلقها في الشفق الكهفي
بلون البن والبرتقال
ليست سوى البكارة والنقاء، وأننا هنا لاريب
نبضات فكر طائف حول طلسم، لحمنا
وكل ما يجول فينا من أفكار
تنهيج من حيث لا نعلم بوجوه الضوء الذهبي
لا تترقف
بل تضرعها أبدا
روح الرحمة
روح لولاها
كنا عدما

دانيال عبدة الجي مور

سامي مهدي
Sami Mahdi
THE SHAPERS
الحمل



I pick up all that is hidden in the ashes without changing the colour of my skin, nor letting the water of my face down,

Clawing my way up, I drift away like the palm trees, blotting the debris out from my way; neither upset by the ruins nor deferred by its blockade.

Conceiving that all who swarm around me are but spiteful spiders, I am not terrified; for I am keeping in heart God's word and holding, in hand a sword or one of God's tablets, from Orok or Baghdad; reciting fearlessly and limply the Opening of the Holy Book; whenever I set pace and thru my blood is grafted precious and valuable grass gratified by a crumb of a bread and smallest bite of durable food; leaving the elegies to the Dervishes and kindling in my soul, without warning, the spirit of the Constructor, that incites me to reshape and erect : a mosque; a school that would match only paradise; a tower at the out-skirt of Al-Karkh and a mansion strewn along the clouds' prairies.

أختارُ ما تحت الرماد، ولا أبدلُ لونَ وجهي أو أريقُ على
الطريقِ مياهَهُ، أمشي كما تمشي التَّخيلُ، وأدفعُ الانقراضَ عني، لا
تُورقني الخرائبُ أو تُعوقني، ولا أرتاعُ مثلَ طريدةٍ ظلتَ تلاحقُها
كلابُ الصَّيْدِ، لستُ ذُبابَةٌ كسلى، وأعرفُ أنْ مِنْ حولي عناكبٌ، في
يدي سيفٌ، وفي قلبي كتابٌ، قلُّ كتابُ الله، أو لوحٌ من الألواحِ، مِنْ
أوروك، أو بغداد، قلُّ ما شئتَ، لكنني أبسملُ حينَ أخطو، دوغما
وجَل، ولا وهنٍ، وفي أقصى دمي شيءٌ من العُشبِ الثمينِ، أقومُ
حينَ أشاءُ، وحصتي خبزٌ أقلُّ ولقمةٌ أجفى، وأتركُ للدراويشِ المراثي،
أوقظُ البَناءَ في جسدي، وأبدأُ مرَّةً أخرى: أعمِّرُ مسجداً لله، مدرسةً
هي الفردوسُ، بُرجاً في ضواحي الكرخِ، بيتاً في مروجِ الغيمِ...

We are all builders: my forefathers, my father and me. We first lay down the basis and then raise up in the name of God: mosques' minarets; bluish domes, arches and overlooking windows. No sooner than a cloak peeps out than we start chanting unsung songs that lax the bloodied- hand and thrust the shutters open, ready to embrace the seducing breast.

At dusk, we put on our most beautiful raiment; leaving our souls to enrapturably unite together under the windowsills of Chalaby's daughter. We are true and honest builders, who have their full of crumb of bread and smallest bite of durable food. We are all builders: my forefathers, my father and me.

No sooner the warriors-our foes-dash to assail us than we jolt upon them like tigers; attack them in defence of our mother - Baghdad, the Sacred- and fight them out with all available tools: knives, daggers, clubs, hammers, slingshots and spanners ,and set up with our wrists and eye-balls, formidable walls, wherefrom our shootd numerous souls override Holako's swords and U.S Tomahawk missiles.

No sooner the dim dust-like cloud clears than we set out to rebuild again. Our build-up could only match magical landscape, whose beauty and splendour crafted by our skilled hands, is preserved for our on-coming days.

We build towers that rise high up the sky-scapes punctuated by God's name; angelic children; righteous women

بنّاوون نحن، أنا، أبي، جدّي، نوّسس حين نبني، ثمّ باسم الله
 نرفعها: المآذن، والقباب الزرق، والأقواس والشرفات، وإذا تلوح
 عباءة في الحى نرتجل الغناء، فترتخي كفّ مخضبة وتفتح كوة
 خضراء للنهد الغوي، وفي الأصائل نرتدي أبهى الثياب، وتلتقي
 آهاتنا تحت شناسيل ابنة الجلبى ... عيارون نحن، وزادنا خبز أقل،
 أنا، أبي، جدّي، إذا دهمت خيول الروم قمنا للقتال بما وجدنا:
 مطرداً، أو خجراً، أو أي شيء كان: مقلاعاً، عصاةً، مخرزاً، أو أي
 شيء، أمنا بغداد فمنعها، وبنينا حولها الأسوار، سوراً من
 محاجرنا، وسوراً بعد سور تنهض الأرواح ذون سيوف هولاكو وتوماهوك
 أميركا، وبنّاوون نحن متى انجلت عنا عجاجتها تحزّمنّا وقمنا
 للبناء، وليس أروع من عمائر نحن نبنيها سوى صور رسمناها عن
 الغد الآتي: بروج ليس يعلوها سوى اسم الله، أطفال ملائكة، نساء

and godly lads. We are true and honest builders, who take comfort of a crumb of bread and smallest bite of a durable food, and are daily whipped by the constant price rises of the greedy and voracious merchants, but yet still stand firm and never yield an inch.

We build up theatres and celestial domes; construct furnaces, cauldrons and incinerators and never wipe out from our memory the lawful paradise.

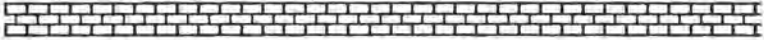
We swap flirting eulogies; believe in our feats and are not baffled by homiletical reciting, and believe firmly in our effective work.

We continue building up; dreaming of storks that wing high o'er our sky-scape buildings; pigeons that flutter their wings above our domes, flooding lights that sprinkle their glittering shining streams along our yards; our children's mirth brimming our houses; the multi-windows, the panes of glass and the fury and dizziness of colours swimming in the spacy multi-rooms; the amorous women proffering to Saint Ilia their flickering candles, in compliance to their pre-avowals .

(Rendered into English by Noel Abdulahad)

صالحات، فتية ورعون... بناؤون نحن وزادنا خبز أقل، يسوطنا
التجار بالأسعار كل صبيحة، ونعاند التجار، والفجار: بنينا مسرحاً
في الأعظمية، ننسى فراديس العدالة... نحن بناؤون يحررنا الشنطع
في الكلام، وقد تغازلنا المدائح، بيد أننا لا نصدق غير أيدينا،
ونبني، زادنا خبز أقل ولقمة أجفى، ولا نختار فاكهة سوى الأحلام،
نحلم باللقاق في أعالي ما بيننا، بالحمام يطير فوق قبائنا، بالضوء
يغمر كل أفنية البيوت، ببهجة الأطفال فيها، بالشبابيك الكثيرة،
بالزجاج وضجة الألوان في الغرف الفسيحة، بالنساء العاشقات وما
نذكرن من الشموع لحضر الياس...

سامي مهدي



THE PIRATE

Translated by Noel Abdulahad

Inflamed with your love: a labyrinthian prelude
Am: everlost in the wild
"Be peace upon you"
And I stepped in...

Set free the memory of the masts,
the waves,
and the sails
It's cloudless: the day of dreams
dawn of the great death,

Stroll along the splendid spaces
To you I donate the earth
For, in loving you,
I will become landlord of the earth
And all kings will be your loyal subjects

Inflamed with your love: prelude of my defeat
Am: The pirate of Time
Plundering all treasures
Pulling down all thrones
And anchoring at the shores of your eyes.

Your eyes
are the four blooming seasons,
Rare flowers of Eden's celestial trees
And life of my life.

Your eyes are vanishing havens
Am: Your vanquished pirate.

Strike deep at your roots
At the vertex of my defeat,
To you I donate the sea;
For, in loving you
The sea is put to flight
The land surrenders
And time's secret subdues.

Under your sun
I unfurl the pages of my life

Stimulated by its graceful warmth
I am enticed to write the epic of horror
and serendipity
The tragic story of *two* world-weary
and lost persons

-You and Me-

The epic of incessant weeping

At your bashful shore
I shred the span of my life into pieces
Dismiss my guards
Fold up my masts
And renounce piracy

The smell of death
Hangs over my head

The smell wafts in the air
Pervading the guile
Sheathes in the marigold
Eyeshotted by the guileless
- a homeland-

To you I present all my losses
The ebb and tide of my life
Wishing to live anew my life.

Lock up then the neck of *love*
Close tightly its cap
With one of your tresses
And a bunch of strewn dreams

Toss me into the sea
And, I shall relate there to the fish
and whales,

The story of a crazy pirate
Haunted by a *Pearl*
Emerged from an unknown zone

Inflamed with your love:
a distracted prelude
Am: The crazy pirate
My blooming life withered
My vessels lost their track
My spoils worn away.
Do not wake me up
Do not stir my defeated submissiveness
As I shall invent to you
A new language
Sway- backed of precious stones

Inflamed with your love :

a graceful fugitive gazelle
Shall we start again?
From the very beginning?

Inflamed with your love:
A prelude to shedding of tears
And death's desideration.

Stay where you have been staying
Be as you were before
A complete amenable woman
In the dimension of dreams,
 craziness
 and
 death...

Muhyi-eddin Lazkani

HERITAGE, DIFFERENCE AND EMPIRE

Shady Abdes Salam and the Egyptian Cinema

The most eminent director of post-revolution Egypt is Shady Abdes Salam. Although he completed only one feature length film in his life time, that film, *El Mommia* or The Night of the Counting of the Years, is widely acknowledged to be the masterpiece of Egyptian cinema.¹ He reigns as an anomaly in the Egyptian film industry. *El Mommia* resembles nothing else in this national cinema and yet it is quintessentially Egyptian. The career of Shady Abdes Salam, limited as it was, indicates not only important national cultural codes but also several key issues central to a consideration of this national film industry.

While his filmic output may have been limited, *El Mommia* is most often cited among film historians as the Egyptian feature film which best embodies some of the most important issues of this national cinema; the subtexts of heritage, difference and empire--in varying ways and with varying degrees of importance--provide the threads which unify the narrative and which tie it to a contemporary non-commercial cinema. These are themes which also provoked problems in the pre-production of the film.

Although Shady Abdes Salam had experienced his share of imposed restrictions and limitations on his filmmaking, his sparse *oeuvre* is primarily of his own making. While censorship and the demands of a commercial cinema industry have clearly hampered the projects, the director had proposed, his own meticulous standards and painstaking methods have further restricted this filmmaker's output to one finely wrought feature film and a second planned project.² His

death in 1986 left this second project, first begun in 1976, still in the pre-production stages.

His training as an architect at the School of Fine Arts in Cairo and his education at Oxford enabled him to work in the technically demanding field of set design. Commenting on this training in a later interview, Abdes Salam has acknowledged that "building houses showed [him] how to construct a film."³ But it was in the more immediately relevant application of set design that he began his career. He proved himself in this area working on four feature films by Egyptian directors and on the international collaboration of Youssef Chehine and others. His technical expertise provided the basis for his entry into filmmaking as the set designer for international co-productions. His attention to detail in costume and set execution established him as a master of visual detail.

When it came time to make the transition to the role of filmmaker, Abdes Salam maintained these skills and used them as the basis for his work. Like many of his contemporaries, Shady Abdes Salam found the climate for filmmaking in the 1960's and 70's in Egypt to be often unresponsive to his projects and his vision. As cultural ministers changed, however, the climate shifted enough to allow him to seriously pursue his first feature length project which would become *El Mommia* or *The Night of the Counting of the Years*.

When Shady Abdes Salam approached the censorship director with his project of *El Mommia* in 1967 it was with a synopsis and script written in English;⁴ the minister of culture at that time, Dr. Al Kasha, had already expressed enthusiasm for the project and the head of the censorship was also intrigued; the film was like no other project in contemporary Egyptian cinema. A period film, set in the 19th century, it deals with the subject of Pharaonic Egypt as a serious theme. The minister of culture and his colleagues regarded the film to be the start of a new wave in Egyptian cinema.

The project, however, faced considerable opposition from the distribution sector of the public sector cinema organization, headed at the time by Dr. Abdel Hassan, an economist primarily interested in making the cinema industry profitable. From his point of view, *El Mommia* was not a viable film project; it would be expensive and would find only a very limited audience in Egypt. He suggested to the censorship that they stop the project on political grounds; the theme of Pharaonic Egypt undercut the more politically correct stance of

pan-Arab nationalism which was fashionable at the time.

The political and cultural climate in Egypt at the time Shady Abdes Salam proposed *El Mommia*, then, was not supportive of his project, either politically or economically; the ministry of culture and the cinema organization were torn between an economically viable film project and a culturally relevant one. Because the minister of culture himself supported the film, the project was approved; but the minister himself had little or no effect on what would happen after the film is completed.

El Mommia was Abdes Salam's first film project as a director and his only feature length film. What characterizes his shorter work, also financed by the post-revolutionary national cinema project, are themes and a visual style which are consistent with Abdes Salam's one feature film and his posthumous project. The history of Egypt, and particularly its ties to the Pharaonic period, are a major subtext if not subject in all of the filmmaker's work. Whether the setting be the Egyptian museum as introduced to children, or the pyramids as backdrop for an exploration of traditional arts and crafts, the aura of ancient Egypt dominates.

The Eloquent Peasant (*Al Fellah Al Fasih*, 1970) is a short feature film financed by the National Center for Documentary Films and one of the two examples of Shady Abdes Salam's fictional work. As such, the film reveals his concerns and visual style. The story is adapted from one of the few extant papyrus texts of Pharaonic Egypt. The papyrus translation serves virtually as the script for the film. The text tells the story of a peasant who has been stripped of his possessions by the henchmen of the Pharaoh; he takes his case to the court and argues it so eloquently that the Pharaoh restores his wealth and more.⁵

The setting of Pharaonic Egypt is one which Abdes Salam was familiar with from his other work and which he would pursue in future projects. The theme of domination and dispossession within this setting is a subtext which remains just as consistent in the filmmaker's work. The relative worth of material goods to the classes represented in the text is at play in the overall structure of the tale.

The dialogue of the film is concentrated in the peasant's arguments before the Pharaoh to reclaim his goods. His arguments, presented in the chanting classical Arabic which Abdes Salam had also employed in *El Mommia*, seems less of a distancing device in this

ancient setting. Nevertheless, the peasant's arguments before the ruler provide a Marxist perspective on relative need and wealth.

The peasant's isolation in the court and in the landscape is also a subtext which reappears in other of the filmmaker's projects. In fact, the consistent use of figures outlined against the desert horizon is a visual motif which is re-iterated in virtually every film of Shady Abdes Salam. In *The Eloquent Peasant* the landscape dominates; the desert setting is foregrounded by long shots which track with the caravan of the peasant and later with the entourage of the Pharaoh. The sound of the film further emphasizes this isolation; and the landscape, the desert wind provides what seems to be a non-diegetic soundtrack for these tracking shots. In fact, there is more noise of the wind than dialogue until the film moves to the interior setting of the palace.

The emphasis on the horizontal axis in camera movement and arrangement of figures can be traced in part to Shady Abdes Salam's attempts to translate the art of ancient Egypt into cinematic language. At the most general level, Abdes Salam has translated the pictorial expressionism of Pharaonic wall paintings into a *mise en scène* which emphasizes the horizontal placement of figures; within this frame, the spectator differentiates between the central most powerful character, who is placed on the main axis and the secondary characters who are placed in varying degrees under or over this central axis.⁶

The art of ancient Egypt has provided the basis for what Shady Abdes Salam has espoused as his own attempt to fashion an Egyptian cinematic language; since the Pharaonic heritage of Egypt is, in many ways, its common heritage, transcending Islam and colonial occupations, it would seem to be a worthy basis for Egyptian cinematic style. The simplicity of this artistic expression, rich in symbol and embedded with semantic meaning, yet essentially simple pictographs, translates into the simplicity and austerity of Abdes Salam's cinematic style.

In *The Eloquent Peasant*, the costumes and detail of setting are simple; the film clearly establishes a temporal and spatial setting but Abdes Salam finds no need to circumscribe the text with the meticulous detail which will dominate the visual style of *El Mommia* and of his unrealized project *Akhneton*. What results is a simpler narrative which is, in its spare style, a closer realization of the papyrus fragment which serves as its script.

The pace of the narrative, with its minimal dialogue and long tracking shots of desert landscape is slow; long takes dominate, whether in close-up shots of the peasant or in moving shots which explore the interrelationship of man and desert. Above all, the wind provides a haunting soundtrack. The expressive stillness of Pharaonic statuary is translated into cinematic terms by the framing and movement of the characters. The frame is emptied of all unnecessary objects and the overwhelming settings of sky and desert provide the central axis of the frame. The resulting text is one in which ritual dominates, although the narrative events are devoid of specific images of religion or rites. The pace of the shots and the chanting associations of the dialogue coupled with the ever-present wind turn the narrative itself into a ritual which unfolds at a hallowed pace.

Although *The Eloquent Peasant* was filmed after Abdes Salam's masterpiece, *El Mommia* (The Mummy, 1968), it is a microtext of the major themes and concerns of the director in his master work. *El Mommia* expands these concerns into a feature film which treats the issues of colonization and its power structure with the same distance and considered pace that is evoked in virtually all of Abdes Salam's work. As we turn our discussion to *El Mommia*, the concerns of the shorter films remain foregrounded but are now heightened in importance by the scope, both narrative and technical, of Shady Abdes Salam's only feature length film.

The subject of *El Mommia* is that of Pharaonic heritage and colonial domination.⁷ A tribe in upper Egypt has been robbing graves and selling artifacts for centuries to support its population; the antiquities ministry in Cairo receives information about this operation and sends a team to investigate this desecration of these ancient monuments. The ensuing clash of cultures--within the society and culture of Egypt itself-- is the focus of the film.

The opening shot of *El Mommia* is a shot which tracks across hieroglyphic paintings as a voice-over narration translates the text. A sound bridge introduces a room in Cairo where a group of *effendis* listen to the continued translation of an ancient papyrus fragment. The bridge between the past and present is established and the central subtexts of heritage, difference and empire which emerge from the narrative voice and the juxtaposition of scenes dominate the remainder of the text.

The film begins in Cairo at a conference table as a group of men in *tarbooshes* discuss the appearance in the Cairo marketplace of a variety of remarkable antiquities. These Egyptians' interest in these artifacts is tied, of course, to the colonial excavations which have raised them to the status of art in European museums. They discuss what is termed "desecration" of their Pharaonic heritage and decide to send a team from the ministry of antiquities to Upper Egypt to investigate. What is most striking about this scene is the anonymity of the setting and the chanting nature of the classical Arabic which is spoken. The dark room, the dark suits and solemn faces of the participants indicate a ritual about to be performed. The authority invested in these investigators is tied to the authoritative setting and to the leverage of colonial interest.

Shady Abdes Salam underscores the solemnity of the subject at hand by using the classical Arabic rather than the spoken dialect of Egypt. Used primarily for reading the Koran, classical Arabic would make the film both more difficult for an audience and at the same time more accessible, since all Muslims share this Arabic through their reading of the holy book of their religion. His choice, then, is tied not only to the audience for the film but also to the tone which this opening sequence sets for the remainder of the text.

The solemnity established in the darkened room in Cairo is transferred and yet totally transformed as the film moves to a village in Upper Egypt. There, daylight dominates and the claustrophobic setting of the colonial conference room is transferred to the tombs where we find the initial action of the story. In the desert, black draped and hooded characters stand in stylized arrangements as the wind provides a haunting soundtrack. There is little dialogue in these opening shots in Upper Egypt; instead, the camera explores the desert landscape and the rocky crevices which conceal the tombs. Throughout, the wind provides a steady haunting sound.

Ritual, those secret and public, provide a focus for *El Mommia*; the hushed tone of the opening discussions of ancient artifacts which begins the film much later translates to the discussions and practices of funerary rites. Death and the rituals associated with it dominate the film, either in narrative or *mise en scène*. The action of the film begins with the funeral of the father of *Wannis*, the hero of the story. The importance of funerary practices and the violation of these rites for more immediate needs is the central concern of the action.

While the *effendis* of Cairo are concerned with the preservation of artifacts of death, the villagers of Upper Egypt are concerned with the preservation of a livelihood. If this means the desecration of ancient tombs to preserve their present life and traditions, then that is what must be sacrificed. To underscore the villagers perspective on their Pharaonic past, one of the initial events in the plot is the funeral of the village leader, the father of *Wannis*. This funeral, solemn and startlingly silent, is a central scene in the film in part because of the visual rituals which dominate the *mise en scène*.

The funeral scene begins with a bird's eye shot of an arrangement of black-clad female mourners. This startlingly expressionistic framing recurs in a number of other key scenes in the narrative. As the funeral procession progresses, the viewer is introduced to a framing device, consistent with the visual style of Abdes Salam's other films, which will serve as a motif in the film. Black figures are framed against the desert and the sky in long shots and long takes which place them above and below a central axis of action. The central characters of the story are arranged along this axis and as the funerary procession moves through the sand and rocks towards the tomb, the black cloaked figures strew vivid purple flower petals across the neutral sand.⁸ The vivid contrast between this carefully enacted and brightly colored ritual action and the dark figures and neutral setting foregrounds is the centrality of this procession. Funereal practices in the present center around the ephemerality of flowers and rites rather than on the endurance of monuments and artifacts. The signs of tradition and ritual have changed but the importance of the funereal rite remains consistent.

The tradition of this present day ritual is juxtaposed in the following scenes as *Wannis* is introduced to the secret knowledge of his tribe. The solemnity of his father's death and funeral is alluded to in the discussions with village elders which immediately follow. *Wannis*, as heir to the knowledge of the tribe, is lead to an ancient tomb by the village elders; in a key scene in the film, the viewer witnesses the young man's horror in a long take reaction shot; what he is witnessing is the desecration of a Pharaonic mummy for the gold jewelry it possesses. His disgust is manifested in his look as the village elders hack this artifact from the neck of the dead. Juxtaposed with the scene of his own father's funeral, this desecration underscores

the issues of tradition and change.

The importance of this heritage and the change which has occurred in the present is re-iterated in the text in terms of economic need; such tomb robbing is justified by the villagers as the key to their livelihood and *Wannis* is entrusted with the knowledge and safe keeping of this tradition. Yet the difference between the ancient regard for the dead and the present use of their heritage is graphically portrayed in *Wannis*' reaction. Several scenes later, he finds a cousin exchanging Pharaonic gold for a prostitute. The economic necessity tied to this ancient heritage in the present is made increasingly demeaning as the film progresses; murder, prostitution and betrayal are among the crimes it generates.

Heritage and its changing status in the society of this Upper Egyptian village is the subtext which generates the intermittent discussions of Empire which form a second thread in the fabric of *El Mommia*. Empire and the Pharaonic tradition are linked as the investigators from Cairo look out over the valley and talk of the great cultures of their ancient ancestors. The issue of colonialism and empire, set as this is in 1881 and introducing Maspero as a motivating character in the first scene, is also a subtext here. Although the film seems to oppose Egyptians against Egyptians in an effort to control the heritage of their country, in fact the control of this past heritage is in the hands of the colonial power, first of the French and in this transitional year of 1881, shifting to the British.

The exploration of this issue of colonial power is rarely explicated in the text, but the *effendis*' discussion of their own past empire certainly indicates the growing concern about nationalism in the time of the story. It also reflects the contemporary situation of the filmmaker and his producers; eager to establish itself as a national voice in Egypt, the Egyptian national cinema board was ready to finance and promote such a project. Shady Abdes Salam wrote and directed *El Mommia* at a time when such a discussion of nationalism and empire would be appreciated within the Egyptian national context. His next feature length project on *Akhnaton* would not receive such favorable attention at a later time but on just these same issues.

A third subtext which unifies the film is that of difference; tied closely to the issues of heritage and empire, the notion of difference is explicitly stated in the character of *Wannis*. The hero of the film is

assumed by his family and villagers to be the heir to a tradition; but he proves himself an outsider to this place and time in a number of different situations. His mother tells him that he has made himself a victim of his difference, no longer a villager yet not capable of becoming an *effendi*. He wanders alone through the massive temple monuments, in a state of transition between this time and place and the past. His loyalties are with neither side; he looks and dresses differently than his fellow villagers and family. But most importantly, he refuses to accept his role as heir to the tradition of grave robbing. Noticing, perhaps for the first time in this village, what corruption this practice itself has generated, he alone is horrified enough to betray his heritage.

The differences multiply as *Wannis* begins to understand the enormity of the desecration facing him. The initial dichotomy established between the city of Cairo and the rural village eventually infiltrates the setting of Upper Egypt itself. While the differences established between the educated urban Egyptians and their illiterate rural compatriots are clearly elucidated in the opening scenes, when the *effendis* arrive in the village they attempt to establish cultural links using the heritage common to both groups.

For *Wannis*, it seems clear that the respect which these educated urban Egyptians have for the past and for its traditions is more in keeping with the emotions these issues evoke in himself. And yet, the world of the *effendis* is not accessible to him; they arrive by boat, observe, exploit the culture of the villagers and leave again, as the Other always has in this portion of the Orient. They represent not the national concerns of Egypt here but the colonial occupation with which they collude and support. Their interest is in the hegemonic not in the common heritage.

Wannis remains behind; a victim of his difference, he has no place in either culture. When the boat returns to Cairo, what faces him is the village, irrevocably changed yet static in its silence. The source of livelihood has been taken from these villagers by the betrayal of one of their own members. *Wannis* will never again be a member of the tribe.

The quote which closes the film, narrated over another long tracking shot of the landscape, addresses the changes which are about to occur; "Arise, you shall not perish; You have been named; you have been found;" heritage has not been lost; having been discovered

by the colonizer, it has been valorized and changed. For the villagers, heritage, empire and difference have been articulated and empowered.

El Mommia was a critical success but a financial failure in Egypt in part because of the artistic and intellectual nature of the work. The distribution sector of the national cinema organization did not allow the film to be screened commercially until two years after it was completed and after it had been screened internationally. In addition, they failed to take advantage of the film's international critical success by exporting it to international film markets. As a result, the film was a financial failure.⁹

The reception of *El Mommia* in Egypt and the failure of the national film organization to market it successfully abroad had serious ramifications for Shady Abdes Salam's future projects, in particular his feature film project, *Akhnaton*. Because this project was to be an epic film centered on Pharaonic Egypt, it held all the same financial risks as his first feature film. In addition, the historical figure of the Pharaoh Akhnaton is a controversial figure both historically and as an icon in contemporary Egyptian culture. As an historical figure, he is remarkable for having attempted to introduce monotheism to Egypt; his cult of the sun god banished all of the other deities from their roles in Pharaonic culture. The link with religion was perhaps the most problematic aspect of the *Akhnaton* project for the national film board to accept.¹⁰ The film, as proposed, was interpreted as elevating the pharaoh to the level of prophet, making implicit connections with the great historical prophets of Islam and Christianity.

Shady Abdes Salam's *Akhnaton* project was to be a monumental epic; the filmmaker had a completed script and detailed costume and setting sketches finished before he died.¹¹ Like any number of the film projects he worked on, from *El Mommia* to Youssef Chchine's *Salah El Din*, Abdes Salam prepared meticulously before he began any undertaking. Sketches, historically accurate renderings of costume and setting, were always a key element in his productions. The script and sketches for *Akhnaton* were completed and the casting had begun before the filmmaker realized that funding for the project would not be forthcoming from the national film board.

As a project, *Akhnaton* was interpreted to represent the contemporary discord within the religious and political establishment in Egypt. The proposal coincided with the rise of fundamentalism in Egypt in Anwar Sadat's era as Sadat encouraged the fundamentalists

as opposition to Naser's supporters. At this point the cinema organization found itself in a weakened position, financially, and could no longer support projects which would be controversial.¹² Private film producers would obviously not have been interested in *Akhnaton*, either, since it showed little promise of financial success.

Shady Abdes Salam had established himself as an outsider to the cinema organization in Egypt on every level; his controversial film projects raised taboo subjects and attempted to present them in a cinematic language opposed to that of the widely accepted commercial industry. His challenge to that industry and to the national film organization left him with few sources of support when his projects became questionable. With enthusiastic support from the national film organization, such as that which allowed *El Mommia* to be filmed, Shady Abdes Salam was a prolific filmmaker; once that support dissipated, he floundered in the quagmire of bureaucracy which is the Egyptian film establishment. As a filmmaker who prided himself on his marginal status, he found no support forthcoming.

Shady Abdes Salam's career as a filmmaker in Egypt was confined in the latter part of his life to documentaries made for the national film organization; these texts reflected his style of filmmaking and usually his concerns with Egypt's artistic and Pharaonic past as well. But for all intents and purposes, his career in feature filmmaking began and ended with *El Mommia*. Regarded simply, one might view this filmmaker as a victim of the bureaucracy and politics of Egyptian filmmaking; but he might be seen as the victim of his own interests as well.

Shady Abdes Salam is clearly a marginal figure in the history of Egyptian cinema, and yet he might be regarded as its most important figure as well. *El Mommia* was considered as a unique film text in this national cinema, both for its artistic import and for its high seriousness in content and form. The fact that such a height has not been repeated, either by this director or by any other, is remarkable in such a long and well-developed national cinema. The economic and export basis of the entertainment film industry in Egypt must be held at least in part responsible for this situation.

Although the national film organization attempted to foster a national cinema, the dominance of economic needs and realities continued to play an important role; in such a system, the large export market and the entertainment industry within Egypt itself would play

an important if not crucial role in the development and implementation of film projects.

The intriguing brevity of Shady Abdes Salam's filmmaking career seems to be the result of a combination of issues; certainly, his own insistence on meticulous period reproductions and his abiding interest in Pharaonic Egypt are two reasons why it might have taken years for him to realize any one project; yet he filmed two of his most important texts--*El Mommia* and *The Eloquent Peasant*--in just eighteen months. His high seriousness as a filmmaker was problematic to a national film board which was more and more concerned with economic stability; the marketability of a film within Egypt and to the known export markets of other Arab countries was and continues to be their primary concern when financing a film project.

Since his death, Shady Abdes Salam has attained a degree of cult status amongst Egyptian cineastes. His films, financed by the National Film Organization, are available only from the national film archives and are not readily distributed in Egypt. His death, rumored to be from AIDS, has further marginalized him as a figure in the approved pantheon of Egyptian film figures. Nevertheless, those scriptwriters and technicians who worked with him on *El Mommia* and on his planned project continue to maintain his reputation with a kind of oral history of his work. The cult of Shady Abdes Salam fosters his reputation as a great *auteur*, as perhaps the only true practitioner of an Egyptian film language. Although the filmmaker himself would no longer mark the text, they maintain the hope that *Akhnaton* will one day be realized.

Shady Abdes Salam's marginal status in such a system guaranteed that it would not work for him. Although his tangential position allowed him to conceive of and, in one instance, realize superior non-commercial film projects, such a position also made him suspect in a very conservative artistic climate. And, in the end, prevented him from working within a national cinema which some might say he continues to haunt.

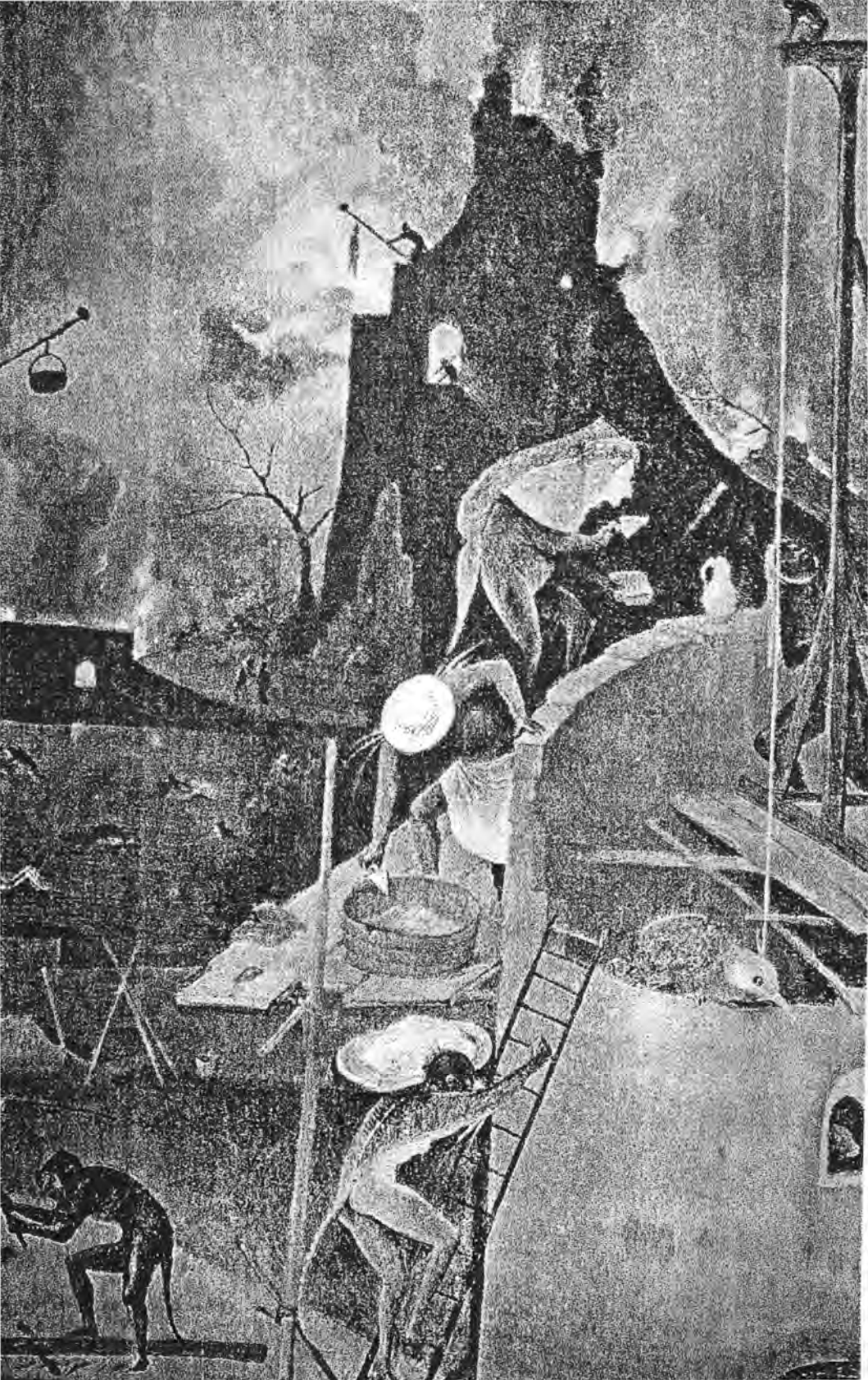
*Maureen Kiernan,
American University in Cairo*

- 1) Virtually all reference works on Egyptian and Arab cinema refer to this film as the highpoint of Egyptian film history; although few

other examples of this national cinema appear in the film histories of the Western narrative tradition, *El Mommia* is usually cited as an example of Third World Cinema from the Near East. David Cook, for example, in *The History of Narrative Cinema* cites Shady Abdes Salam in this context.

- 2) Interview with Salah Marei, December 8, 1991.
- 3) Yves Thorval, *Regards sur le cinema egyptien*, Beirut: Dar el Mashreq, 1975, p.80.
- 4) The information concerning the early negotiations on the script for *El Mommia* was supplied by Mustafa Darwish, head of the censorship at this time, in an interview on December 13, 1993 in Cairo.
- 5) Claude Michel Cluny, "Shady Abdes Salam" in *Dictionnaire des nouveaux cinemas arabes*, Paris, Sinbad, 1978, p. 92.
- 6) Much of this discussion of visual representation and cinematic style in *The Eloquent peasant* is based on discussion with Siham Abdel Salam.
- 7) For an extensive discussion of this topic and its relationship to gender issues in Arab cinema in general, see Ella Shohat's article "Gender and Culture of Empire: toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema" in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Vol. 13, (1-3) pp. 45-48.
- 8) See earlier reference to discussions with Siham Abdes Salam and Ahmed Hassouna.
- 9) Interviews with Salah Marei on December 8, 1991 and January 4, 1992.
- 10) Interview with Mustafa Darwish, December 13, 1992.
- 11) Sketches depicting the costumes and various aspects of the palace setting are available for examination from the estate of Shady Abdes Salam.
- 12) Interview with Mustafa Darwish, Cairo, December 13, 1992.

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BABA NOËL AND THE APOCALYPSE

BABA NOËL

The Sleigh of Baba Noël (Santa Claus) stopped at the balcony of our home on the sixth floor. Baba Noël alighted from it and was followed by a massive horde of children who filled the room with commotion.

Baba Noël said: "It's a holiday and you're sitting here by yourself?"

I apologized. I told him that I had become a grownup yesterday and it was no longer suitable for me to celebrate holidays.

He laughed until he flipped onto his back. He said that all children that I now saw had been grownups before riding in my sleigh.

* * *

The children jumped onto my table. They clambered over my shoulders. One of them pulled my eyeglasses off, threw them to the ground and broke them. I sank to the ground pummeled it with my hands and feet. I shrieked and said: "I want new eyeglasses. I want new eyeglasses". I fought with the child who broke my eyeglasses. Baba Noël intervened. He scolded me and said: "Don't you know him? He is your brother Able. Kiss him". I wanted to embrace Able. He yelled: "Baba Noël!!! Cain intends to strangle me again!" and he ran away...

* * *

The children were waving balloons. They hold in their hands

different toys; trains, wooden horses, dolls.

Baba Noël blindfolded his eyes and the children began to play hide-and-go-seek. Baba Noël runs, bumps into the furniture, and falls down. Crawling on his knees, the children climb onto his shoulders and burst with laughter.

* * *

Getting tired, Baba Noël ordered me to continue the pastime game and he blindfolded my eyes. The children roared with screams and laughter, jumped between my legs, pulled my clothes and forced me to fall down more than once. I caught one of them, and grabbed the hem of his clothing. He screamed: "Baba Noël! Baba Noël! Cain wants to strangle me again!"...

Baba Noël carried me between his arms. He said that he would throw me from the top of the balcony if I would not leave Able alone. I promised him I would and pleaded with him to untie the blindfold from around my eyes.

A child approached me. He placed a piece of candy in my mouth. He said that Baba Noël had lots of candy in his sleigh.

I begged Baba Noël to let me ride in his sleigh. He laughed. The children bellowed: "Ho! Ho!" Baba Noël said that he had been sure that I would be accompanying them. I told Baba Noël that I had also been sure that I would accompany them. Baba Noël knelt down. I climbed up onto his shoulders. He walked and the children around us clapped their hands, danced and laughed.

I asked Baba Noël:

- Are you going to give me some candy?
- Yes, yes...
- And you'll let me ride over the white horse?
- Yes, yes...
- And will you buy me new clothes?
- Yes, yes...
- And new eyeglasses?
- Yes, yes..
- And a balloon?
- Yes, yes... He said laughing... and pulled out from his sack a big red balloon: "Blow hard." I blew, "Blow harder. With

more force.. with more force...”

I was blowing and blowing and Baba Noël was laughing and laughing...

When He crossed with me through the window the balloon exploded causing immense thundering. All things were shrouded in utter darkness.

(Translated by Ghassan Wahbeh)

Beirut 1970

THE APOCALYPSE

The dead had been resurrected and the earth rammed violently; the crowds lined up in numerous queues. I ran around looking for room in the long, jammed queues. There was a mix of wailing, weeping, imploring, screaming, supplication, guffawing and nervous laughter. I was shivering all over with dread and terror. It was the day of which we had been forewarned; the day that brings unmatched punishment and unheard of shackles.

But why is he going to punish me? Is it because I had been without a tail, or because I had one? Or is it because I had a short one?

I wanted to stand in line with those who had tails, but they hailed me with slaps and kicks and screamed at me saying: “even here?” I stood by the tailless, but they were not less cruel and unfriendly. One of them rebuked me and said: “You no Longer belong to us”. Added another: “And who knows, the situation might get reversed. Go to hell with your despicable tail.”

I retreated to the end of the lines, lonely, subdued and broken. I walked slowly and thought to myself of standing in front of him eventually. He would be fair to me. I would say “You have created me after your own image and example. What image are you? What example?”

If you are tailless, then why did you allow the tailed to prevail? Why did you even create them in the first place? If you are tailed, why did you then make us tailless? and blessing me with a tail, why did

your generosity stop short of giving it some length? Thus I have no legitimate tail to rejoice over; nor am I tailless that I can at least find solace in the company of my people.

I would weep in front of him and ask. "why is it that all those whom you blessed with tails can see their tails, but I cannot? This is far from justice." "My lord, once I suffered so much because I was tailless, and once because I was of short tailed. Finally I am now in front of you, so what are you going to do with me? Are you going to disown me too? If so then where is your justice? where is your mercy?"

I would drop at his feet, wet them with my tears and cry: "You see, there is no line I could belong to; you either make my tail longer or rid me of it. But if, for a wisdom beyond my comprehension, you will keep me as I am, then I will not object, yet perhaps you would instill some mercy in the hearts of both the tailed and the tailless so that they do not push me right and left."

He will understand me. He will raise me with his hands to him saying, "come close to me my son; you have suffered so much for no fault of yours. Come close to me, short-tailed; I will make your tail longer." He will take my tail in his merciful hands, touch it gently with his compassionate palm. The tail will extend and extend and extend that it becomes the longest tail ever had by any creature. It will extend even to encircle the earth, the heavens, the planets and the whole universe.

He will seat me at his side and consult me about the affairs of his creatures. I will give him my advice, for I will have acquired the courage to talk to him without fear, since my tail will have become the longest and biggest tail among all creatures on earth and in heaven. I will appeal to him to be kind to them. I will forget their derision and abuses and say: "They are your servants after all, whether they are tailed or tailless, and that is not their fault. It is time you made their buttocks uniform so that you reconcile their hearts."

I might get carried away with courage - since I will have become his equal tail-wise; and blame, or even scold him: "You might even be the one to blame, before and then. Praise be to you, anyway, for no one is to be thanked for adversity, except you."

Praising my courage, he will pat my tail. He will let everyone into his heaven.. I will say:

“Who are you?..”

I was greatly shaken by a shriek that caused me to lose consciousness and fall down on my face. When I came round up, my ears were deafened by hysterical laughter and uproar, and all were laughing, the tailed ones and the tailless.

Above the heads of all creatures, there stretched a gigantic tail that coiled around my wrist and cracked it. The pain made me scream and ask for mercy. Under the pang of pain, I fainted again. When I regained consciousness, I heard a stronger shriek: “Who are you whom you stand before me with this tail... and want to enter into my Kingdom?”

His tail raised me high and high that I thought he was going to fling me to the lowest level. A giant hand grabbed me; it grasped my tail between its forefinger and the thumb. It started swinging me back and forth. There was a burst of laughter and uproar: “Eat him; crush him. rid us of him.

What a nuisance he is: both tailed and tailless.”

I opened my eyes. There was a gloomy look, open jaws, gigantic teeth, flame-emitting eyes, and erect horns gushed forth to the sky through a military beret.

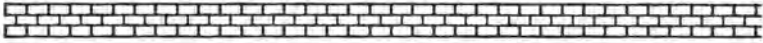
“He will devour me” I thought with fright. But my tail was pressed between the forefinger and the thumb, smashed and broken.

I shouted: “If you do not want- or rather cannot- make it longer, then why do you cut it off ? Leave it for me as it is at least.” But my shout was lost amid the hysterical uproar and mad guffaws.

I was separated from my tail; and I fell down from above, screaming: “Jehovah! Are you a God or a Devil?”

(Translated by Faisal Mohammed)





اللوحة الأخيرة

مهداة إلى ليلى العطار

THE LAST PAINTING

Dedicated to Layla Al-Attar

حميد سعيد

The painting shows a sketch of a formless woman.

Towering trees stretch along in every spot; in between the missing fruit and bare water; and the seductive Creation's line and blank painting's sphere.

The brown woman's gown is full of rips, and a lot of blank spaces cover one of its edges.

في اللوحة سيّدة لم تتشكل بعدُ
الأشجارُ الفارعة امتدّت وانتشرتُ
بين الثمر الغائب والماء العاري
وغواية خط التكوين
ومحيط اللوحة أبيض.. في ثوب
السيدة البني شقوقُ
وعلى طرف منه مساحات بيضُ

The lady's name is Layla Al-Attar. She holds on in hand a stony-*sumak* talisman that she has obtained from an Indian box, found in one of the multi-rooms' house

The Sheikh addresses Her Saying:

“Keep on your stony talisman, it wards off threatening dangers and reveals to your painting-brush rayless secrets”

Layla Al-Attar was vigil at her drawing-studio at that night. Her fingers were busy in plucking some hidden treasures: glittering moons; sparkling patterned clouds and luminous butterflies;

But, Alas...

وليلي العطار قائمٌ من حَجَرِ السَّمَاءِ
وَجَدَتْهَا ذَاتَ نَهَارٍ
في صندوقٍ هِنْدِيٍّ في إحدى غُرَفِ الدارِ
قالَ لها شيخٌ من أقصى لَوْنِ الفِضَّةِ
ليلى...

احتفظي بتمانك الحجرية
تكشفُ للريشة ما أغلقَ
من حجبِ الأسرارِ
وتدفعُ عنها الأخطارِ

في تلك الليلة كانت تسهرُ
في مرسَمِها
تتصيدُ من بعضِ كنوزِ أصابعها
أقماراً وسحاباً وفراشات

The colours secluded in the *kohl's* flagon; surrendered obediently to the bleak wave of oblivion.

Do boon companions announce at this night their rebellion wrapped in the apathy of close ranks?

Bill Clinton with a sword in hand, taken from the Museum of Isabel of Castile, comes in: waxed face, glazed eyes; nails of diamond; a heart of wood tightly twined by threads of spun brass. He comes in and stabs the pomegranate of Her painting. Burnt-blood spills; oil pipes effervesce and the house' walls collapse.

لكن الألوان
اعتكفت في حق الكحل
ونامت في برد النسيان
أو بعد الألفة
يعلن، في هذا الليل،
الألف العصيان؟

يدخل بيل كلنتون
في يده رمح جاء به
من متحف إيزابيللا القشتالية
وجه شمعي وعيون من خرز
وأظافر من ماس
قلب من خشب مشدود
بخيوط نحاس
يطعن رمانة لرحتها
فيسيل دم محترق
وتفور أنابيب الزيت
تتهاوى جدران البيت

The white spaces are occupied by brutal ashes, barbarous embers and black bursting storms; and the trees retreating from colour's cell come back to earth, and bloom in the lanes of night.

Her Murderer blasted a black sun.

From which sky the volcanic lava poured forth ?

From which breasts the melting boiling steel sucked its milk?

From which book was the Dinosaur taught homicide?

Which school taught him to raise to rivers the hanging ropes ?

يحتلُّ مساحات الأبيض جمرٌ شرسٌ
وعواصفٌ سودٌ.. ورمادٌ
لكنَّ الشجرَ الهاربَ من أسْرِ اللونِ
يعودُ إلى الأرضِ
ويُزهَرُ في طرقاتِ الليلِ
أطلقَ قاتلُها شمساً سوداءَ
من أيِّ سماءَ
جاءَ المطرُ الحمى
من أيِّ الأتداءِ
رضعَ الفولاذَ المتوحشَ
في أيِّ كتابِ
قرأ الديناصورُ تعاليمَ القتلِ
تعلمَ أن ينصبَّ مشنقةً
للأنهارِ !

To you O Women of Avignon belongs the wind's harvest.

Wisdom is retained to Picasso-springing out from his *Guernica*

The flute and Summer fruit go to Jawad Salim.

The vibrations of Her footfalls go to Haifa Street.

And in our Hearts and Minds we keep, all of us, Her Memory that we may bring her: stars, toys and a cloudless sky.

(Rendered into English by Noel Abdulahad)

لنساء آفنيون حصادُ الريح
ولبيكاسو الآتي من غورنيكا
حكمتُه..

لجواد سليم قيثارته
وثمار الصيف
ولشارع حيفا وقع خطاها
ولنا..

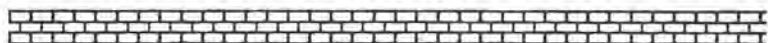
أن نتذكرها
ونجيبها لها..
بسماء صافية
ودمي ونجوم..!

جميع سحر

١٩٩٣-٧-٢٧



What has been left of Layla and her house!



Mourning Becomes Layla...

**My Friends,
Your 'Damage'**
Collateral Cost in Baghdad
By Yasmine Bahrani

Last Sunday morning when many of us watched reports of the overnight bombing in Baghdad, a friend of mine who lives in Canada learned on CNN that her mother and father had been killed. One of the missiles that had gone astray slammed 984 pounds of explosives into a house in the Mansour neighborhood, killing Layla Attar and Abdulkhaleq Juwaidin, as well as their housekeeper. My friend's brother and cousin were also seriously injured. Her sister, it turned out, was mortally wounded. wounded.

The White House and others meanwhile, were declaring the attack by 23 Tomahawk cruise missiles a success. Rear Adm. Michael Cramer told NBC there were civilian casualties "but they're insignificant". Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called it "collateral Damage." Vice President Al Gore used the word "proportionate" to describe the attack.

I no longer have the energy to quarrel with the American government over the ultimate "justice" of the attack-- meant as

retaliation for the alleged plot against former president George Bush. But I do want to take issue with those tidy dehumanizing terms like "collateral damage." This time the phrase has a special meaning for me and all other Iraqi Americans who were in hysterics last Sunday trying to telephone Baghdad to see if all were well.

The Mansour section of Baghdad was where I lived as a child. It is a neighborhood of elegant homes and embassies -- the Kalorama of Baghdad. There were graceful palms and eucalyptus trees, citrus and mulberry trees. And kids always climbed over the wall to eat the neighbor's mulberries because somehow they tasted better. As a child, I played with Layla Attar's children. We all attended Mansour School, where her sister Suad taught us art. Layla's nieces are still my friends.

Layla was a modern Iraqi woman. She was career-oriented, a museum Curator--one who used the female nude in her work, an act of feminist fortitude in Iraq. At home, she was generous in her encouragement of young artists. She exhibited in world capitals, and everyone thought she was destined for international fame.

That she was killed in last week's ride is, by any measure, bizarre--a case of lightning truly striking twice. During the first bombardment of Desert Storm, in the winter of 1991 their home was hit and demolished. The house in which they were killed last week belonged to Layla's sister. One wonders just how "smart" these bombs can be if they hit the same family twice.

A friend of Layla's, Nuha Al-Radi said, "All my hair stands up when I see that it followed her down the street. It's like an appointment in Samarra; Fate has got to get you."

But was it Fate? Of course, it is understandable for a country to retaliate when the life of a former president is threatened. It is understandable that accidents happen. But in this case, out of 23 missiles, 16 hit the intended target-- which means about a third of the bombs didn't. Three hit civilians homes. When terrorists strike, killing civilians at random, we

condemn it. The people killed last week in Baghdad had nothing to do with the alleged plot against George Bush. Their mistake was to live in Mansour, relatively close to Saddam Hussain's intelligence headquarters.

Layla's daughter, Reem, died of her wounds last week. Her son Haidar was just released from hospital. He is staying with neighbors because he has no place to go. My cousin Hajar kept a bedside vigil.

During this past week, I've thought a lot about the time when I was in school, in October 1993, and we were told that the invasion of Grenada was a clean action. Later it was revealed that the mental hospital had been hit and at least 20 people killed. At the time, I thought it was sad that innocent people died.

Now I feel much sadder, as I do when I read about victims and "collateral damage" in places like Somalia or the former Yugoslavia or Iraq. I will think how each victim was important to someone-- someone's mother, sister, father and friend. Last week, for me, they were.

(The Washington Post)

Death of an Artist

By Anne Fairbairn

Layla Al-Attar was killed as she slept in her bed during the early hours of Sunday June 27. Thirty-five houses were flattened in the Baghdad suburb of Al Mansur during the United State missile raid directed at the Intelligence Organisation Headquarters. Her husband, Abdul Khaliq Juweiden and her teenage daughter were also killed. I had known Layla Al Attar for a number of years and I consider her death is tragic and senseless. She was a talented artist as well as being the director of Baghdad's chief Art Gallery, the Centre of Arts. She was dedicated to the Centre, and had spent many years fostering the development of the work of Iraqi artists and promoting the work of the contemporary school which has received world-wide acclaim.

On a number of occasions she had invited me to give talks at the Gallery about Australian poetry, and I have been able to illustrate my talks and give an insight into the imagery in the poetry, by showing slides of Australian paintings. Those who came to hear my talks were particularly interested to learn about the work of Aboriginal Artists and contemporary artists such as Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd, John Olson and Fred Williams. I was able to give Layla some prints and I believe her favourite was one of a painting in acrylic of the Australian Western Desert by Aboriginal Artist Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. She told me she would like be able to have an exhibition of Australian Aboriginal paintings at the Gallery and I hope that sometime in the future I may be able to arrange such an exhibition to honour her memory.

Layla had enormous vitality; she was creative in every way.

I have taken many packets of seeds of Australian wildflowers to the Arab world when I have been invited to give talks about our poets and their work. Somehow our wildflowers seemed to be a potent symbol of growth (in understanding). She was one of the few people who actually planted the seeds and

watched the plants grow and flower in her garden. I had promised to bring her packets of Kangaroo Paw seed on my next visit.

Three months after the end of the Gulf War, I visited Baghdad in order to take medicines and vitamin tablets to my friends and to many of the doctors who had become my friends over the years. I arranged for Australian artist Kevin Connor to come with me. I took him to meet Layla and she arranged for us both to give a talk at the Centre and Kevin presented copies of some of his illustrated catalogue to the centre.

An Iraqi friend had written to tell me that Layla's house had been hit by a bomb during the Gulf War and that she was lucky to be alive. Layla explained that because she had been spared, she felt compelled to work even harder for Iraqi artists. She agreed with me that art and literature transcend all the differences and bring the people of the world closer together in understanding.

During the build-up to the Gulf War I had made an official presentation of a painting to the Gallery and again Layla made all the arrangements.

In the late 1940s and early 1950 (Australian Medical Army Officer (Lieutenant General) Sir Robert Drew, had been seconded from the British Army to the Foreign Office to set up the modern school of surgery in Baghdad. He was a close friend of my family, and when many years later he heard that I was often in the Arab World, he gave introductions to his many former students, and they and their families have become my close friends. In the 1950s the famous Iraqi artist, Jawad Salim, gave Lady Drew a painting of the Tigris River. This painting very clearly demonstrates Jawad Salim's great talent as an impressionist artist. Just before Lady Drew died in 1990, I visited her in hospital and she asked me to take the painting back to Baghdad and give it to the Art Gallery. So I took it with me when I went to Baghdad during the time of the hostage crisis. I knew that Lady Drew would not want the painting to be part of any discussion or negotiation about the hostages, and I

also felt this would compromise the integrity of her gift, so I did nothing about the painting until a decision had been reached about the hostages. Then I went to see Layla and arrangements were made for me to present it to the Gallery. Layla was very happy about the gift and she explained to me that Jawad Salim was the leader of the Modern School of Art in Iraq and this painting is of enormous value to the Gallery. She said in her speech of acceptance that those bonds of friendship she and I were forging between creative artists and poets in Australia and Iraq, were made even stronger by the gift of Jawad Salim's painting.

Layla Al-Attar had an aura of creativity about her. It seems particularly poignant and tragic that her life was spared when her home was bombed during the Gulf War, and now her home has been destroyed again but this time she died. The power of darkness have savagely claimed her in the most brutal way.

I shall take seeds of the Australian wild flower Kangaroo Paw to plant near her grave next time I visit Iraq.



The survived paintings

Le chaos du nouvel ordre mondial

Par Hédi Turki

Amie de tout le monde, Laila Attar fut une grande dame, talentueuse, avec beaucoup de classe et compte parmi les meilleurs peintres arabes. La nouvelle de sa mort dans le dernier bombardement de Bagdad a empli mon cœur d'amertume et de désarroi.

Dans la tourmente où, peut-être, le silence seul serait grand, je me sens pris d'envie d'émettre, cependant, quelques réflexions.

L'Humanité, a plus que jamais, mauvaise mine. Je n'aimerais pas jeter la pierre à un peuple. Le crime est inhérent à la nature humaine, surtout, quand elle n'a plus de doute sur la supériorité de sa force. Rares sont les gens qui restent sages et généreux, tout en étant les plus forts!

Ce qui paraît une prouesse est en fait, un acte barbare. On tient une leçon au plus faible, sachant que l'on ferait impunément et qu'on pourrait le faire spectaculairement et même en être félicité!

"L'ordre nouveau", tout en condamnant furieusement le terrorisme international, feint, néanmoins ignorer le génocide quotidien du peuple palestinien par les armes du sionisme expansionniste.

Dernièrement, à la télévision française M. Shimon Peres déclarait tranquillement au paroxysme du cynisme, que la "terre" est très étroite et que le délai de cinq ans est absolument nécessaire avant de reconnaître des principes de base dans la discussion avec les Palestiniens, ce qui équivaut à gagner du temps et à ne rien donner. Quant à la Bosnie-Herzégovine, le "Nouvel ordre" s'en fiche comme de l'an 3000 et livre en pâture aux Serbes ces Musulmans désarmés et empêchés de s'armer. Où sont-ils passés les droits de l'homme et autres slogans démocratiques, anti-terroristes? On est en droit de se demander pourquoi ici l'intervention est très rapide, tandis qu'ailleurs, le terrorisme est toléré, encouragé et protégé. Alors que ordre est synonyme de justice, l'injustice est une

sorte de ruine et d'auto-destruction, elle se retournera fatalement contre ses auteurs. J'espère qu'il n'est pas trop tard pour sauver cette pauvre petite terre. En attendant, les "Nations Unies" ressemblent de pus à la "société des nations" instituée, au lendemain de la première guerre mondiale, par des hommes importants tels que le Président américain Wilson.

L'Allemagne hitlérienne, se sentant très forte, a bafoué la "société des nations" et déchiré le Traité de Versailles. Ce fut le glas de la paix.

Aujourd'hui, pour que la paix soit sauvée, les Nations Unies ont un urgent besoin d'un ordre, défendu, pourquoi pas, par la plus grande puissance ou par plusieurs puissances militaires, mais un ordre de justice.

(Action)